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THE NEW YORKER

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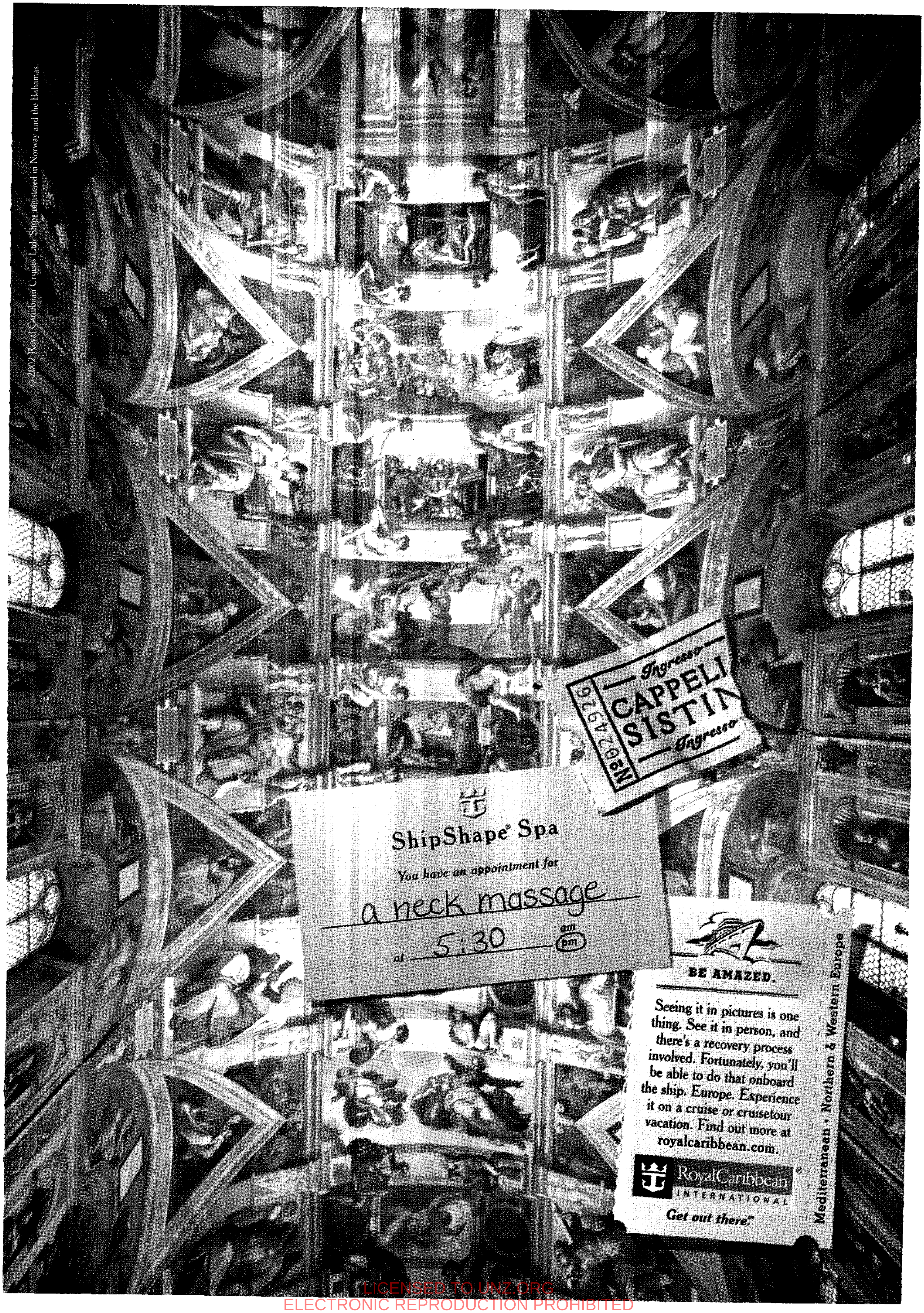

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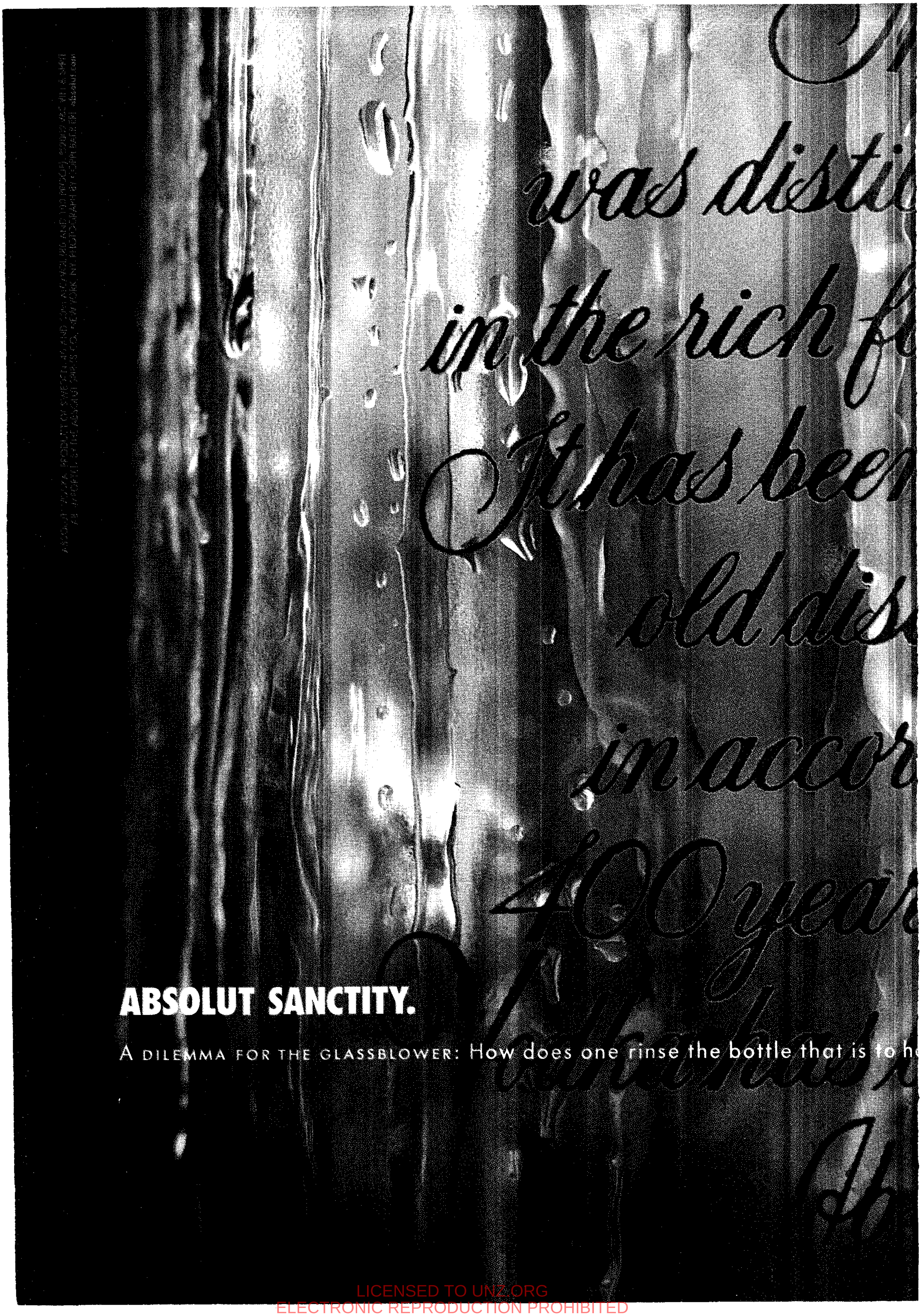
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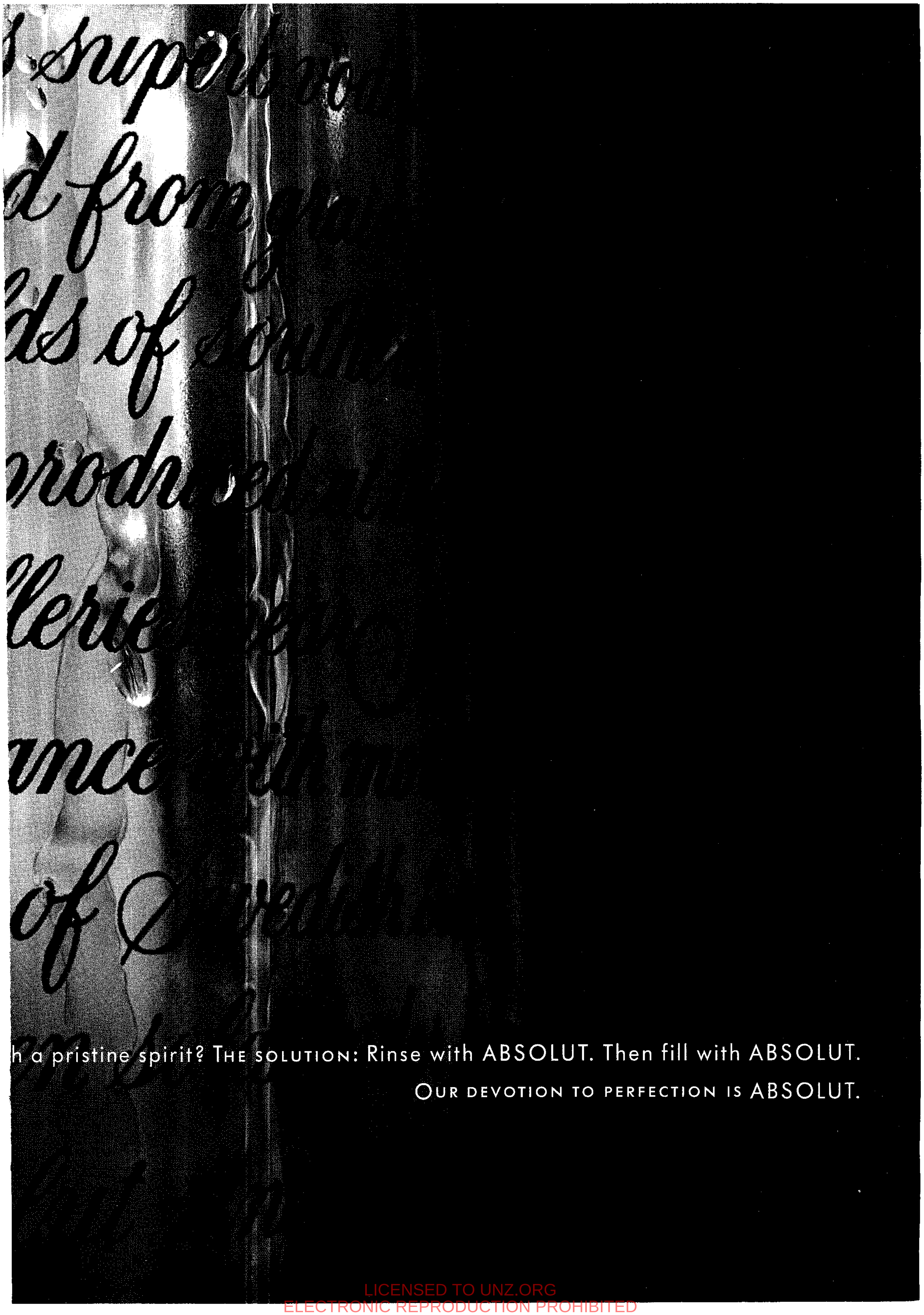
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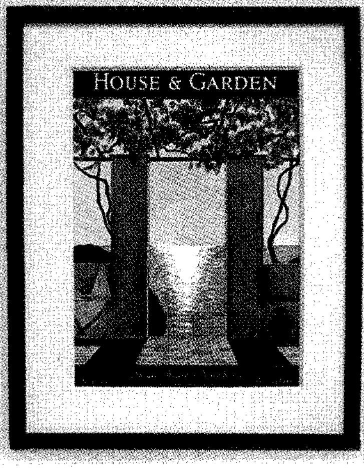

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Christopher Logue (Poem, p. 83) will publish "All Day Permanent Red," the fourth volume in his version of the Iliad, in April.

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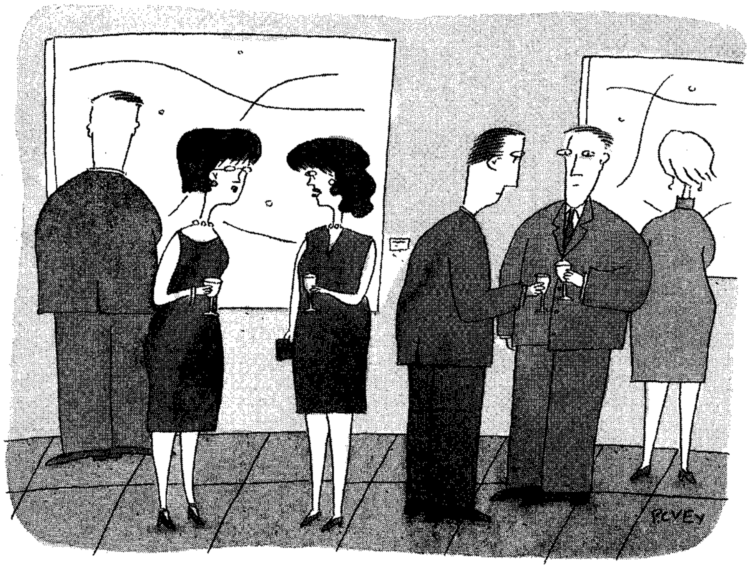

"I can't imagine bringing a child into the current art world."

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THE MAIL

WHAT WOOLF SAW

Susan Sontag, in her essay on photography and conflict, notes that Virginia Woolf built her essay against war in "Three Guineas" around a description of photographs of victims of the Spanish Civil War ("Looking at War," December 9th). Interestingly, Woolf deliberately withheld those photographs—of "ruined houses" and "dead children"—from the text. She did so because she was troubled by many of the same ethical issues involved in the visual representation of political violence which trouble Sontag today. Instead, Woolf included images of a general, an archbishop, a judge—men in costumes of power. (Sontag's own copy doubtless lacked these photographs.) Some readers might be puzzled, at first, by the "wrongness" of the photographs and their lack of fit with the text, but this was precisely Woolf's point. She often used absence in her work to signify that the reader's job was to fill in the gap. Her hope was that readers would realize that they had to concentrate on the men who made war rather than on the images of graphic horror. Woolf's intentions were not lost on her publishers, who, for many decades, did not respond to scholars' calls for the inclusion of the photographs as key to reading the essay.

Jane Marcus
Distinguished Professor of English
City College of New York
New York City

THE SCIENCE OF VODKA

Victor Erofeyev, in his article on vodka in Russian history, perpetuates a legend: that the chemist Dmitry Mendeleyev somehow reinvented (or, at least, perfected) the liquor ("The Russian God," December 16th). The claim is derived from William Pokhlebkin's history of vodka, which, as Erofeyev suggests elsewhere, is characterized by imaginative nationalism. Mendeleyev's work on the 1894 vodka commission was not about the best way to mix vodka but about how to measure the quantity of alcohol so the excise tax could be levied more efficiently. It had been known for centuries that water and alcohol contract when mixed; Mendeleyev's study of the phenomenon was part of his doctoral dissertation, in 1864—five years before his famous formulation of the periodic table—and had nothing to do with vodka per se. What's interesting about this story is the Russian desire to appropriate Mendeleyev to add legitimacy to any possible piece of culture. Mendeleyev himself, not averse to claiming sole credit whenever possible, would have found this ironic. He feared becoming an alcoholic, having watched one of his elder brothers descend into dipsomania. His youngest son, Ivan, met a similar fate after his father's death. Dmitry himself always avoided vodka. He preferred Georgian wine.

Michael D. Gordin
Cambridge, Mass.

THE REAL WEINSTEIN

Ken Auletta, in his profile of Harvey Weinstein, the co-chairman of Miramax, passes too quickly over an episode that says a great deal about the kind of man Weinstein is: the production of Atom Egoyan's "Ararat" ("Beauty and the Beast," December 16th). The subject of the film is the psychological and moral effects of the extermination or deportation of two million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks under the cover of the First World War. In response to Turkish attacks on the film aimed at Miramax and its parent, the Walt Disney Company, Weinstein told the press, "They're denying history. To me, the denial of the Armenian Holocaust reminded me of the denial of our own Jewish Holocaust. I felt strongly about that." That took courage, which is perhaps what is really at the core of Weinstein's character.

Cross G. Mooradian
Troy, Mich.

•

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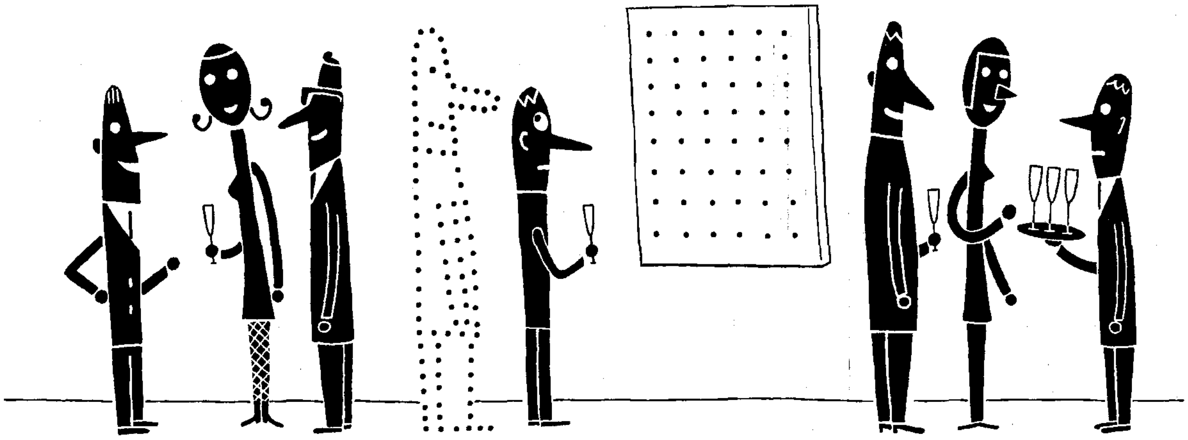
AND: A calendar of *New Yorker* events across the country

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

COMEDIANS
Jim Dale and Raul Esparza play standup comics in Manchester, England, in the New Group's revival of Trevor Griffiths' drama, set in the nineteen-seventies. Directed by Scott Elliott. In previews. (Samuel Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

COOKIN' AT THE COOKERY:
THE MUSIC AND TIMES OF ALBERTA HUNTER
The Melting Pot Theatre presents Marion J. Caffey's bio-musical of the great blues singer, with Ann Duquesnay in the title role. Previews begin Jan. 14. (Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 279-4200.)

CORNER WARS
Tim Dowlin's play about the crack-cocaine trade in North Philadelphia has an original hip-hop score by Strongarm Entertainment/Roundtable. Directed by Mel Williams. Previews begin Jan. 13. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

DONMAR WAREHOUSE
"Twelfth Night" and "Uncle Vanya" have arrived from London to run in repertory at BAM. The ensemble cast includes Emily Watson, Simon Russell Beale, Helen McCrory, and Mark Strong. Directed by Sam Mendes. "Twelfth Night" opens first, on Jan. 10 at 7:30. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

INSIDE A BIGGER BOX
In a play by Trish Harnetiaux about modern anomie, a woman's husband becomes obsessed with the idea of making an art exhibit out of Post-its, her sister loses herself in romance novels, and she herself succumbs to a Twinkies addiction. In previews. Opens Jan. 10 at 8. (78th Street Theatre Lab, 236 W. 78th St. 206-1515.)

KEROUAC
The last hours of the Beat poet are imagined in a new production of Tom O'Neil's play, directed by Anthony P. Pennino. Previews begin Jan. 11. (PC2, 616 Ninth Ave., at 44th St. 352-3101.)

LOVE/SAD
In a Studio 42 production, Bajir Cannon's new play, inspired by a Persian folktale, tells the story of a pilot, his wife, and other characters, who search for the meaning of love. The show has an original score by Kabir Green and Tim Jones and choreography by Jeremy Steinke. Previews begin Jan. 9. Opens Jan. 11 at 8. (Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk St. 352-3101.)

MYSTERIES OF ATTRACTION
The Worth Street Theater Company presents a new play by Marlene Meyer, set in Los Angeles, about tensions in the lives of two brothers, one a lawyer, the other a cop. In previews. Opens Jan. 12 at 5. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 206-1515.)

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NEW YORK GILBERT AND SULLIVAN PLAYERS
The 2003 season at City Center includes "The Pirates of Penzance," "The Mikado," and "The Gondoliers." "Pirates" runs Jan. 10-12. (145 W. 5th St. 581-1212.)

PANIC
In Richard Foreman's new play, a band of modern-day hippies seek enlightenment through mountain climbing, punk rock, and Mahler. Previews begin Jan. 9. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

SHANGHAI MOON
The Drama Dept. presents a new play by Charles Busch ("The Tale of the Allergist's Wife"), set in Shanghai in 1931, about a young American woman who betrays her British diplomat husband and succumbs to the sensual seduction of the Orient. Busch plays the straying wife; B. D. Wong is her Asian paramour. Directed by Carl Andress. In previews. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 633-9632.)

TARTUFFE
Joe Dowling directs a Roundabout Theatre Company production of the Richard Wilbur translation of Molière's play, with Brian Bedford, Henry Goodman, and J. Smith-Cameron. Opens Jan. 9 at 7. (American Airlines, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ADULT ENTERTAINMENT
Elaine May's laugh-out-loud sortie into public-access pornography, "Adult Entertainment," directed by Stanley Donen, features Heidi-the-Ho and her porn-star pals—who long to have words, not just organs, in their mouths. May loves her collection of lost meatheads, and her fine cast, including Danny Aiello, Jeannie Berlin, Eric Elice, and Linda Halaska, makes you care for them even as May pokes good fun at their stupidity. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/23 & 30/02.) (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave. 239-6200.)

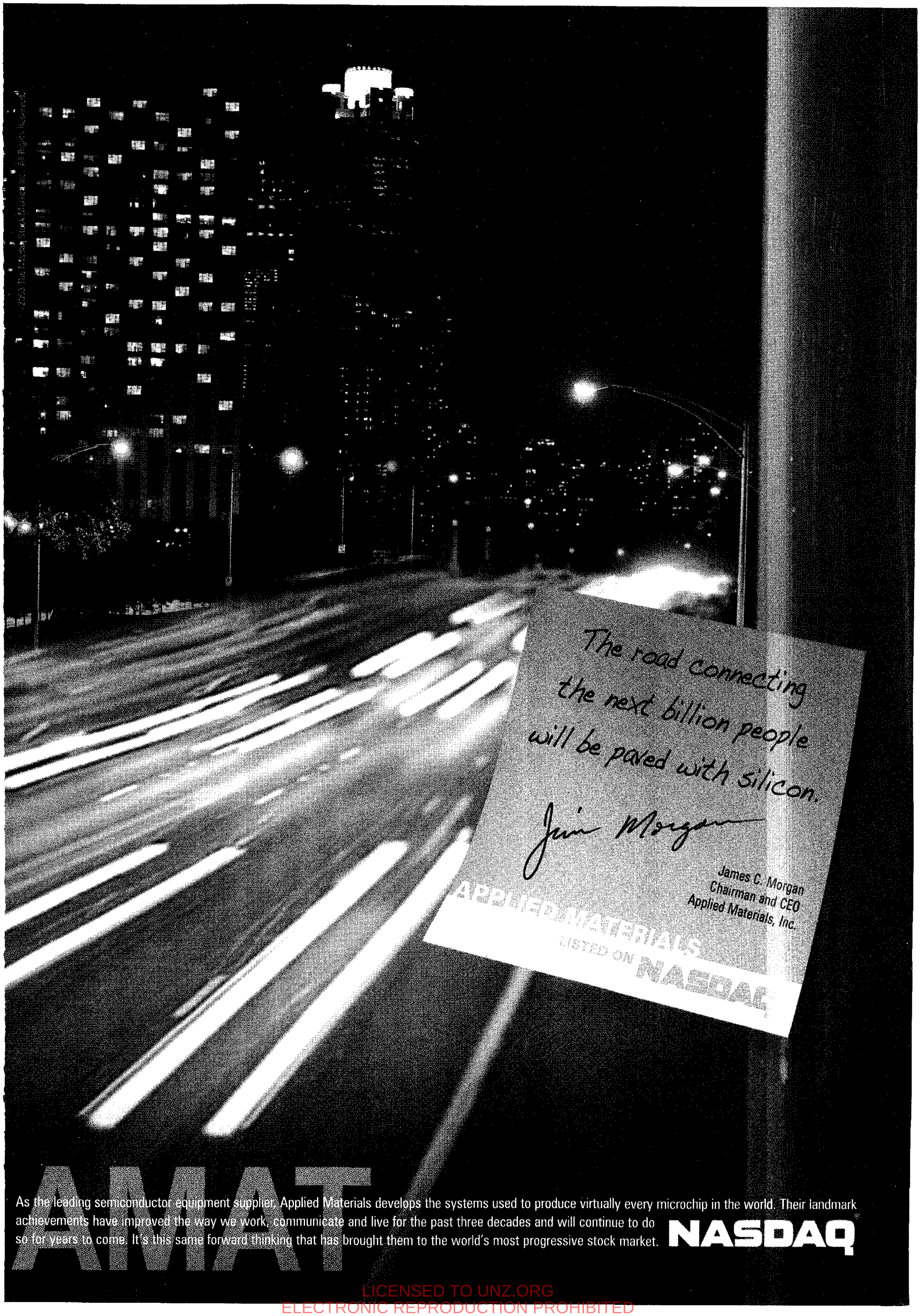
BETTY RULES
A kinetic alterna-rock musical, directed by Michael Greif ("Rent"), chronicling the nearly two-decade-long career of a real-life girl band called Betty and its members' battle to keep the group and their sanity intact on the road, at home, onstage, and even in therapy. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 239-6200.)

BLUE/ORANGE
At the outset of Joe Penhall's sharply funny new play, a young white psychiatrist consults his supervisor about whether he should send a young black psychiatric patient home. Their debate—over whether it's patronizing to consider the man sick in the first place—quickly spirals out of control. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 12.)

LA BOHÈME
Baz Luhrmann has reset Puccini's opera in a cinematic Paris of 1957—on the eve of Godard's "Breathless"—and his *moto*-ready cast of young studs looks the part. Rodolfo and Marcello wear leather jackets and boots, Mimi sports a trench coat, and the red-hot Musetta (Jessica Comeau) has hipster slacks and an Ann-Margret kittenishness. For Musetta's splendid "Quando me'n vo," the ensemble gathers on a silverized Parisian street that looks like a black-and-white Doisneau shot come to life. Rodolfo (David Miller) and Mimi (Ekaterina Solovyeva) have terrific voices, and they're both eye candy: he's a young Belmondo to her Eva Marie Saint. When this Rodolfo first lays eyes on this Mimi, enough heat jumps between the two of them to melt the snowflakes. It makes you want to hop a plane to Paris—the Paris in Baz Luhrmann's mind. Note: Three rotating casts perform the lead roles. (Broadway, 1681 Broadway, at 53rd St. 239-6200.)

CLASS MOTHERS OF '68
Here is a show for every woman who has ever sacrificed for her kids, and every kid who should be grateful. Does that leave anyone out? On a clever set (designed by Beowulf Boritt) that shifts, scene by scene, into the living rooms and lives of six different mothers, Priscilla Lopez portrays all the moms—each made fully individual by Lopez's gift for accents and physical expression, each connected by anxiety over her child's impending high-school graduation. To echo the working mother's dilemma: However does she do it? Written by Eric H. Weinberger and directed by Jeremy Dobrish. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES
In this new musical, based on a Roman Polanski film and directed by John Rando, Michael Crawford plays an ancient vampire with a Romanian-Italian accent and a lust for the young virgin Sarah (shrilly played by Mandy Gonzalez). Most everything about the show is garish, from the trashy costumes to the Day-Glo makeup to the "Thriller"-inspired choreography to the Halloweeny sets. The music, written by the record producer Jim Steinman, leans heavily on his eighties hit "Total Eclipse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of the Heart." Only Crawford emerges unscathed from this extended Meat Loaf video, although he is onstage far less than his large fan base might appreciate. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

DEBBIE DOES DALLAS
A saucy postmodern musical, adapted from the porn film, and well played by Sherie Rene Scott (as Debbie), Mary Catherine Garrison, Jon Patrick Walker, Paul Fitzgerald, and others. (Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

DINNER AT EIGHT
In the revival of George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber's 1931 play, directed by Gerald Gutierrez, the splendiferous table on which the dinner will be served hovers like a crown, silver service glistening, five feet above the stage. It is a deft Expressionistic touch in a play that is otherwise lumbered by its naturalism. Coming from an earlier, class-ridden time, this old theatrical warhorse is fiendishly hard to play; most actors in this more egalitarian era don't understand the pride and prowess of servants or the nonchalance and imperiousness of patricians. Still, the cast canters gamely through the windy prose, and the dialogue offers some incidental pleasures, including Marian Seldes's turn as the preening, hilarious Carlotta Vance. (1/6/03.) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 26.)

The Moonlighters play Otto's Shrunken Head (see Night Life).

THE EXONERATED
Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen's pared-down play, directed by Bob Balaban, tells the harrowing stories of a handful of souls who have spent up to twenty-two years on death row before walking free. (10/28/02) (45 Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

FAR AWAY
In Caryl Churchill's thrilling fable, a not-too-distant totalitarian society is engaged in a war of all against all. Humans, animals, nations, insects, the elements—even gravity—make and break alliances, with bloody consequences. The show's vivid, nightmarish centerpiece, a fashion parade of the condemned, knocks the breath out of the audience. The show is not to be missed. Directed by Stephen Daldry. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 18.)

FLOWER DRUM SONG
Part fashion show, part night-club act, part hymn to Asian-American diversity, David Henry Hwang's update of the 1958 Rodgers and Hammerstein show, set in San Francisco's Chinatown, works far better than the original. With snazzy direction and choreography by Robert Longbottom and vivacious dancing by Sandra Allen. (11/4/02) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE
Rosie Perez and Joe Pantoliano star in Terrence McNally's sentimental two-character study about a man and a woman marginalized by life. Joe Mantello directs. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY
To sink any deeper into Hank Williams's blues, you'd need to hop into a pickup truck, drive to Nashville, and buy a bottle of J.D. In Randal Myler's beguiling musical biography of the hard-drinking, softhearted crooner, Jason Petty retraces Williams's journey from hardscrabble childhood to honky-tonk renown. The audience keeps him company all the while, tapping their toes even when he's so lonesome he could cry. Petty's delivery of Williams's songs sounds astonishingly like the original, and he looks the part, too—as do his pointy-booted backup musicians, the Drifting Cowboys, who jolly up the journey with their ready humor and their dexterous playing of banjo, mandolin, fiddle, harmonica, and spoons. Margaret Bowman shines as the singer's fist-swinging, Bible-thumping mother, Mama Lilly. (Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 239-6200.)

IMAGINARY FRIENDS
Nora Ephron's new "play with music" about the feud between Mary McCarthy and Lillian Hellman glitters with professionalism but to almost no point. The two divas—expertly played by Cherry Jones, as an eerie McCarthy look-alike, and Swoosie Kurtz, as the forked-tongued Hellman—bitch glibly at each other, but the actual story of the hatred between the two women is far uglier than anything they show us, and the range of Hellman's bad behavior was far worse. The music, by Marvin Hamlisch, features some clever lyrics by Craig Carnelia, which neither advance the notional plot nor illuminate its central issues, and the attempt to turn a literary circus into an intellectual vaudeville is gleeful but misguided. (12/23 & 30/02) (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

JOE AND BETTY
Not your typical Catskills play: in Murray Mednick's latest, Annabelle Gurwitch and Joe Diehl play a poor couple with six kids in a small town in the winter of 1951. He's feckless, but it slowly becomes clear that she's the bigger problem—she's descending into a profound depression. For a portrait of a disintegrating family, the evening affords a surprising amount of humor, and, although the direction is irritatingly stylized (at the whim of the playwright, the actors face the audience at all times), the cast overcomes it to create a sense of sad reality. Gurwitch's performance holds it all together: as the layers peel away from the banality of her daily struggle to feed her kids and pay her bills, revealing deeper troubles, her transformation is subtle and compelling. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

MAN OF LA MANCHA
If hearing "The Impossible Dream" four times without intermission is your idea of a good night out, then "Man of La Mancha" is for you. Superbly staged by Jonathan Kent, the show features a sensational set by Paul Brown that has more tricks than a circus pony, but no amount of proficient talent (Brian Stokes Mitchell is the nutty knight of faith, and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio is the toothsome tart Aldonza) and no amount of high-tech prowess can disguise the fact that this Don Quixote–Sancho Panza cartoon is romantic kitsch. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

MEDEA
In her daring modern interpretation of Euripides' drama, well directed by Deborah Warner, Fiona Shaw enters wearing sunglasses, a cardigan sweater, and a tidy summer dress, the picture of almost demure self-control. She has a lithe, muscular body and a sinuous mind to match, but she is a nervy woman pushed to the end of her tether, her mind and heart racing in adrenaline-pumping panic. Nothing she does onstage is generalized. Every line is parsed with clarity of feeling. "My lovely life is lost; I want to die," she says in her first speech—acknowledging that her husband, Jason (Jonathan Cake), is leaving her to marry a young princess. "He was everything to me—and now / He's the vilest man alive, my husband." Fuelled by envy's scorched-earth policy, which spoils all goodness, the barbarous and demented magic of revenge rears up before our sometimes averted eyes. (12/23 & 30/02) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

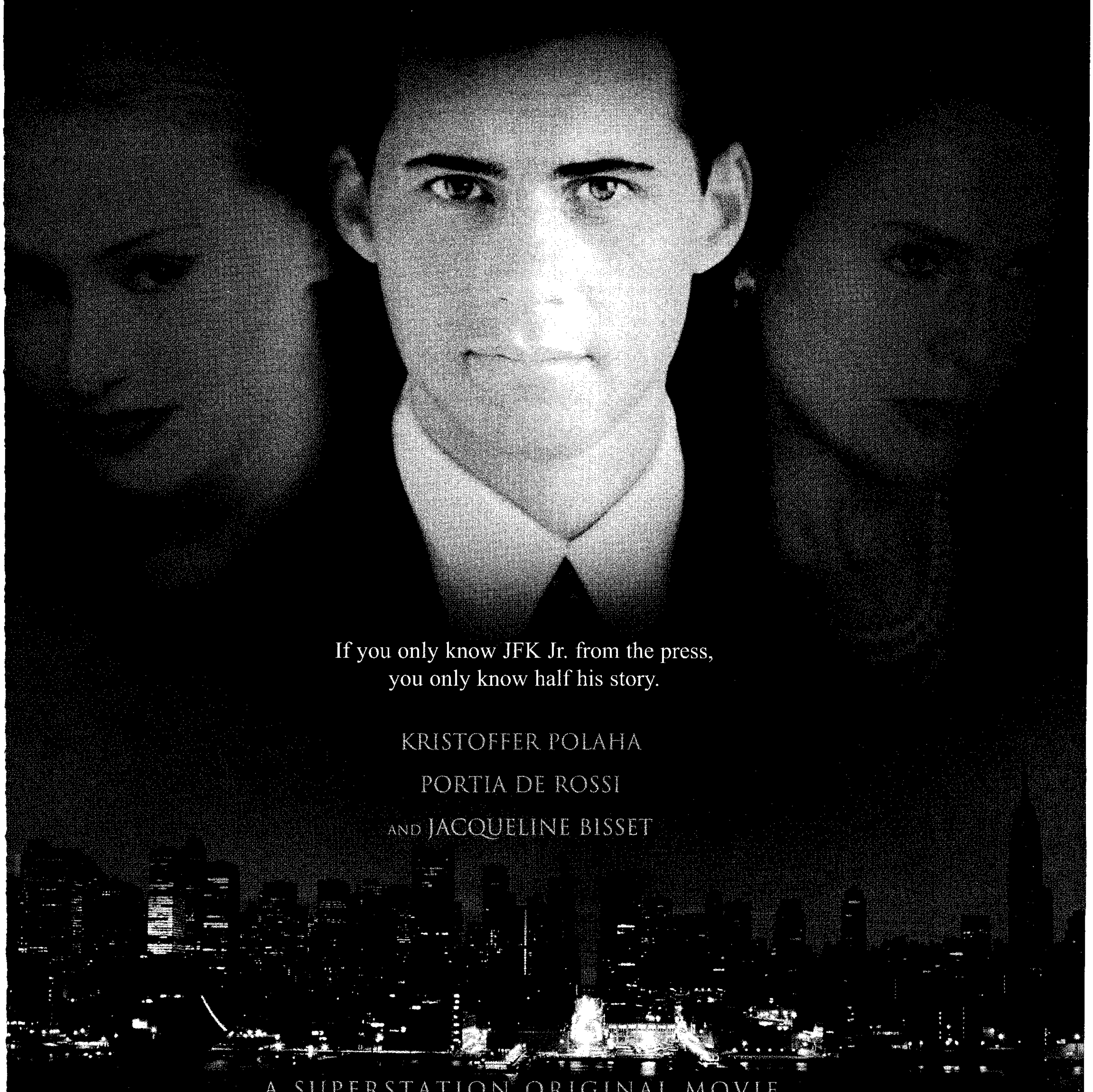
THE MERCY SEAT
There's no playwright on the planet who is writing better than Neil LaBute, whose magnificent new play only goes to show that it's always darkest before it's totally black. For a hundred minutes, the audience seems to hold its breath as Sigourney Weaver and Liev Schreiber, giving performances of a depth and concentration that haven't been seen in New York for many seasons, take us through the torment of two lovers the day after September 11, 2001—the day, it turns out, that they are faced with the decision of whether to slip away from New York and start a new life together. Directed by LaBute. (1/6/03) (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Jan. 12.)

MOVIN' OUT
Twyla Tharp's show about small-town teen-agers coming of age during the Vietnam War era is set to twenty-seven songs by Billy Joel. The band is terrific, and the dancers—above all, John Selya as the hero, Eddie—are positively on fire. (11/4/02) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

OUR TOWN
In a marvellous Broadway revival, directed by James Naughton, Thornton Wilder's play speaks as unforgettably now as it did at its première, in 1938. As the Stage Manager—the play's narrator and the link between the worlds of the living and the dead in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire—Paul Newman projects half a century's expertise and good will. God should look like Newman: lean, strong-chinned, white-haired, and authoritative in a calm and unassuming way. (12/16/02) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 26.)

MARCELLUS HALL

A WORLD PREMIERE EVENT



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you only know half his story.

KRISTOFFER POLAHA

PORTIA DE ROSSI

AND JACQUELINE BISSET

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AMERICA'S PRINCE

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY JR. STORY

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[illegible] A.C.I. [illegible] LINDSEY [illegible] DAVID [illegible] [illegible] BONNIE RASKIN [illegible] THE DAY JOHN DIED by CHRISTOPHER ANDERSEN [illegible] ERIC LANEUVILLE

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PORTERPHILES
Even when he was not the top, Cole Porter was still top hat and tails above most other songwriters. In the York Theatre's production of thirty new Porter songs—performed by the pianist Judy Brown, who discovered them—Lynne Halliday, Ricky Russell, and Stephen Zinnato serve up a cocktail menu of melodies that Porter wrote between 1911 and 1956 to accompany lyrics to songs that were never published. The best of the bunch is "Coffee," a paean to the restorative brew, sung by hung-over bons viveurs, and several story songs, including "I Wrote a Play," "The Extra Man," and "Where Would You Get Your Coat?" (with the Noël Cowardy lyrics "If home life didn't thrill a / South American chinchilla / Where would you get your coat?"), deserve to have a play written around them. But even a goof like "Tequila" has that glass-clinking magic. (Saint Peter's Theatre, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 12.)

RUSSELL SIMMONS' DEF POETRY JAM ON BROADWAY
The hip-hop legend has brought together spoken-word stylists from his HBO show and from the national poetry-slam circuit to create an exuberant, defiant production. The rap bards deliver poems that are part autobiography, part social commentary—addressing everything from love, America, racism, and terrorism to Krispy Kreme doughnuts. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

SAY GOODNIGHT, GRACIE
Frank Gorshin is George Burns in Rupert Holmes's touching one-man tribute to the unsinkable comic and his more-than-a-sidekick wife, Gracie Allen. It's not just a showcase for one man; it's a showcase for an era. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE TEMPEST
The director Padraic Lillis has traded the strangeness and danger that are so often emphasized in Shakespeare's story for a more naturalistic presentation. As Prospero, the wronged Duke of Milan who becomes a magician in exile, Robert Hock seems like any doting father—who just happens to keep a sprite as a slave and have goddesses pay him social calls. Indeed, the stranded nobles who wash up on Prospero's shore are not so much afraid as bemused. The result is a sweet-natured storm that is less about power and revenge than about love and regret. The relationship between Prospero and Ariel (Celeste Ciulla) is especially poignant, and Dominic Cuskern, as a drunken jester, adds comic zing. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes Jan. 26.)

TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE
Based on Mitch Albom's best-selling book, the play is a love song to a wise old professor who taught an unreflective younger man how to feel. Alvin Epstein plays the mentor—Morrie Schwartz—with wit and heart, and John Tenney is touching as Mitch, the brusque mentee. Directed by David Esbjornson. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

DANCE

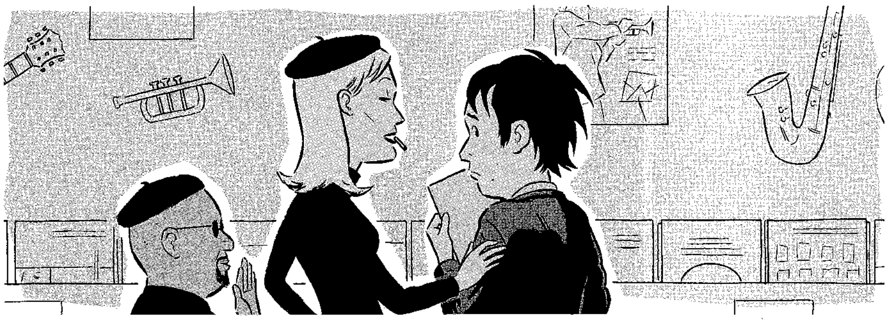
NEW YORK CITY BALLET
"Part of why she's so wonderful is that she doesn't know her own beauty," says Christopher Wheeldon of the ballerina Wendy Whelan, who, barring schedule changes, will perform in his "Morphoses" this week. Undistracted by vanity, Whelan consistently surrenders herself to the spirit of a dance—provided, of course, that the dance has a spirit, as Wheeldon's always do. In "Morphoses," the four dancers are bathed in medieval darkness; accompanied by György Ligeti's swampy, discordant "String Quartet No. 1," they rise from a cross formation on the floor to entangle themselves in lonely duets, then exit or enter the stage solo, in straight lines that never intersect. Whelan, who traces those lines in swift, unstoppable bourrées, seems driven by a force more powerful than her feet or her will. ♦ Jan. 8 at 8: "Symphony in Three Movements," "Vespro," and "Fancy Free." ♦ Jan. 9 at 8: "Raymonda Variations," "Morphoses," and "Symphonic Dances." ♦ Jan. 10 at 8: "In G Major," "Morphoses," "The Infernal Machine," and "Symphony in Three Movements." ♦ Jan. 11 at 2: "Serenade," "Le Tombeau de Couperin," "Pavane," and "Western Symphony." ♦ Jan. 11 at 8: "Raymonda Variations," "Vespro," and "Symphonic Dances." ♦ Jan. 12 at 3: "Serenade," "Morphoses," and "Fancy Free." ♦ Jan. 14 at 7:30: "Le Tombeau de Couperin," "The Infernal Machine," "Vespro," and "Symphony in Three Movements." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570.)

"ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT"
The Joyce festival continues with the première of Keely Garfield's brutally funny "Deep"—a free association on life in Manhattan after 9/11. In Garfield's vision, New York is the Emerald City of Oz, and Dorothy (Garfield) gives the Wonderful Wizard-cum-mayor a beating for being a hoax, a sideshow huckster, and no help at all. As the crew of untidy, madcap dancers cope with skewed reality, they try to dance gracefully to Marc Ribot's whirling score, but their attempts at elegance dissolve into unseemliness. Garfield's troupe has the soul of a naughty child—and a child's impulse toward stark truthfulness. The program also includes the works "Free Drinks for Ladies with Nuts" and "My Mother Was a Four Alarm Fire." ♦ Jan. 8 at 8: "Keely Garfield Sinister Slapstick." ♦ Jan. 9 at 8: "Peter Boal Solos." ♦ Jan. 10 at 8: "ZviDance." ♦ Jan. 11 at 2: "ZviDance." ♦ Jan. 11 at 8: "Keely Garfield Sinister Slapstick." ♦ Jan. 12 at 2: "Keely Garfield Sinister Slapstick." ♦ Jan. 12 at 7:30: "Peter Boal Solos." ♦ Jan. 14 at 8: "Peter Boal Solos." (Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. The festival continues through Jan. 19.)

URBAN TAP
At thirty-seven, Tamango is an astounding tap dancer—liquid, elegant, and as expressive with his torso as he is with his freestyle feet. His life story is equally unusual: born in French Guiana, he moved to France as a child, trained as a painter, was adopted by a Parisian baron, and started studying tap after his guardian noticed him dancing as he painted. In the nineties, on the streets and in the clubs of New York, Tamango honed his skills as a dancer and impresario and put together the intercultural jam sessions called Urban Tap. With a changing lineup of percussionists, capoeiristas, real-time video artists, and dancers on eighteen-foot stilts, the shows can be an exhilarating mix or a disappointing mess. This week, Tamango returns to the Kitchen—the site of his 1999 Bessie Award-winning début—with "Kádanse," a show that returns to his artistic roots by featuring live painting and also includes elements of voodoo and Haitian drumming and dance. (512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. Jan. 10 at 8 and Jan. 11 at 8 and 2.)

ALL THIS JAZZ

Best Jazz Albums of 2002



ADRIAN TOMINE

What keeps a song in a jazz musician's heart these days is anyone's guess. The past few years have seen the major labels all but turn their backs on the genre: the high-profile buzz of Ken Burns's 2001 documentary never translated into solid sales increases, nor has the hunger for all things American spread to our own classical music. Yet jazz has weathered slumps before (older players still remember the pop-infested sixties and seventies with a shudder). For the most stolid of contemporary jazzmen and women, judging from some of the finer recordings released this year, solace seems to reside in the bedrock of melody.

Lynne Arriale, "Inspiration" (TCB)—The pianist Arriale, who forthrightly titled a 1999 album "Melody," knows the value of something that's too often overlooked by improvisation-worshipping jazz fans: a great tune. This lyrical player and her sharp-eared trio embrace the songcraft that links Keith Jarrett's "So Tender" to Burt Bacharach's "A House Is Not a Home," and Abdullah Ibrahim's "Mountain of the Night" to Lennon and McCartney's "Blackbird."

Tony Bennett & K. D. Lang, "A Wonderful World" (Columbia)—Bennett and Lang pay tribute to Louis Armstrong through his more commercially successful songs. It takes artistry to pull something like this off, and both the venerable crooner and the younger eclectic have it in spades. Neither are jazz vocalists per se, but through the Master they find their own inner swing.

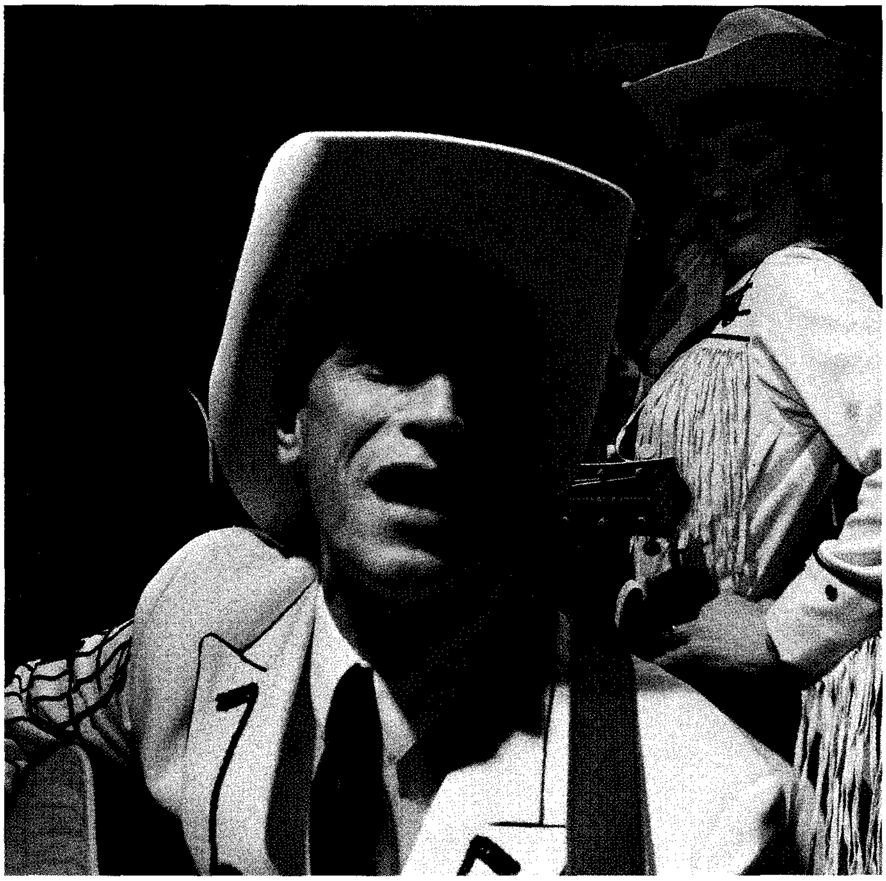
Dee Dee Bridgewater, "This Is New" (Verve)—There's life in the jazz concept album yet. The veteran singer (a Tony winner who still remains frustratingly off the wider radar) brings new lustre to signature songs by Kurt Weill and captures the composer's expansive Weimar-to-Broadway range: her "Speak Low" is penetratingly intimate, her "Saga of Jenny" uproarious, and her "Alabama Song" downright lascivious.

Bill Charlap, "Stardust" (Blue Note)—Tipping his hat to the durable material of the grassroots genius Hoagy Carmichael, this elegant, old-soul pianist and his responsive trio are joined by such guests as Tony Bennett, Shirley Horn, the guitarist Jim Hall, and the saxophonist Frank Wess. The result is a mainstream masterpiece from an exceptional stylist poised to replace Bill Evans and Tommy Flanagan in the public imagination.

Jason Moran, "Modernistic" (Blue Note)—Another triumph for an ambitious young pianist whose career has so far been an unbroken chain of artistic successes, this imaginative solo recital gives us a peek into the mind of a individualist gracefully forging a path that encircles the past and the future. Work by James P. Johnson and Muhal Richard Abrams rubs up against daring revisions of Robert Schumann and Afrika Bambaataa's "Planet Rock."

Michael Moore, "The History of Jazz, Volume 2: Dedications" (Arbors)—The respected bassist Moore, who has played with everyone from Freddie Hubbard to Ruby Braff, turns to the piano with gratifying results on a handful of cuts on this always surprising release. The record wanders freely through an outsized chunk of the music's history with performances that favor invention over reverence.

—*Steve Futterman*



Jason Petty, in "Hank Williams: Lost Highway" (see Theatre).

WILLY SOMMA

"VISIBLE CONTENT"

In this powerfully weird tragicomedy, the choreographers Andrea Lerner and Rosane Chamecki dramatize the everyday life of the mind as it responds first to outer stimuli and then to inner compulsion—bouncing back and forth like a Ping-Pong ball. A dancer grimaces or waves as if a gesture had overtaken her, then shudders softly, as if a thought were tunnelling to the surface. Soon, the same gestures show up on another dancer, but he doesn't notice the connection: there's no solace here in shared experience. "Visible Content" looks strange but feels familiar. Tarek Halabi, Maria Hassabi, Paul Matteson, and the choreographers (alternating performances) make up the engaging cast; the electroacoustic band Azores, on turntables, keyboard, and guitar, supplies the sound. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Jan. 7-8 and Jan. 11 at 7 and Jan. 12 at 2. Through Jan. 26.)

NEW SHANGHAI CIRCUS

This acrobat-rich, animal-free circus is electrifying in its intricacy and invention. In one number, a young woman balances on one hand atop a man's head and executes precision archery with her feet. The acts begin daringly, and the glorious outlandishness only increases as the show continues. Jan. 8 and Jan. 11 at 2 and 7, Jan. 9-10 at 7, and Jan. 12 at noon and 5. (New Victory Theatre, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

"DANCE ON CAMERA"

The thirty-one-year-old film festival mixes artsy shorts, in which the camera is the lead dancer, with more straightforward documentaries. The focus this year is on Africa—where the emphasis on the past just may point to the future of modern dance. The nine choreographers featured in Ken Glazebrook's "African Dance: Sand, Drum, and Shostakovich" bring a modernist aesthetic to assorted African vernaculars and revive the mythic and earthy qualities that modern dance had in its early days. The movement here has not been tempered by balletic influence, as has much American modern dance; it still belongs to the entire body. The wrenching short "Guguletu," on the other hand, is all about ballet—the instruction that two white South Africans offer black children in Cape Town townships. "I first heard about ballet in 1999," one little girl says, as if she were talking about finding Jesus. And she might as well be: the children's faith in the fifth position helps them transcend difficult lives. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. Jan. 10-11. Call 875-5600 for show times. Through Jan. 18.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Jan. 11 at 8: The deep-voiced Angolan singer Bonga. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St.) Jan. 12 at 7: An evening of fado music with the Portuguese performers Jose Manuel Barretto and Maria Amélia Proença. (Great Hall.) For more information, call 545-7536.

BEN FOLDS

Owing more to show tunes and seventies singer-songwriters than to the alternative-rock scene that spawned him, Folds is perhaps best known for his autobiographical ballad about teen-age abortion, "Brick," a plangent hit that catapulted his guitarless, piano-based band, the Ben Folds Five (actually a trio), into the limelight in the late nineties. Folds, who never fit snugly into rotation next to angst-ridden guitar bands, has since shed the band and stripped the act down to simply himself and his piano, although his music remains as earnest and cheeky as ever. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Jan. 9-10 at 8.)

AL DI MEOLA

This dexterous guitarist has come a long way since the days when he tried to raise smoke from his fret board during the manic heyday of fusion. His passion increasingly centers on world music with a Latin bent; he's fond of such South American composers as Egberto Gismonti and the great Argentine tango master Astor Piazzolla. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Jan. 11 at 8.)

SAVOY-DOUCET CAJUN BAND

The Eunice, Louisiana, native Marc Savoy is an accomplished accordion maker and player as well as a persuasive ambassador of Cajun culture. His Savoy-Doucet Cajun Band—which features his wife, Ann, on guitar, and the Beausoleil fiddler Michael Doucet—is his most successful tool (aside, perhaps, from the come-one, come-all jam sessions at his accordion factory in southwestern Louisiana). The group mixes traditional songs and originals, with Ann Savoy using French dialect and earthy phrasing to capture everything from the melancholy of backcountry life to its earthy joy. (La Belle Époque, 827 Broadway, at 13th St. For more information, call 685-7597. Jan. 12 at 7:30.)

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Nancy Wilson, one of the last of the old-school divas, gets her night in the Lincoln Center spotlight. As much a supper-club fixture as she is a jazz stylist, Wilson flaunts a commanding presence—she's spent her life holding an audience in the palm of her hand. She's given the full treatment here, supplied with a jazz band and a string ensemble. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Jan. 13 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Jan. 9-11: As life gets faster, **B. B. King** continues to take it slow. His guitar playing has evolved into a ritual, each note massaged into an ecstatic sheen. His voice, happily ruined from years of touring, sounds like an invitation to testify.

BOTTOM LINE

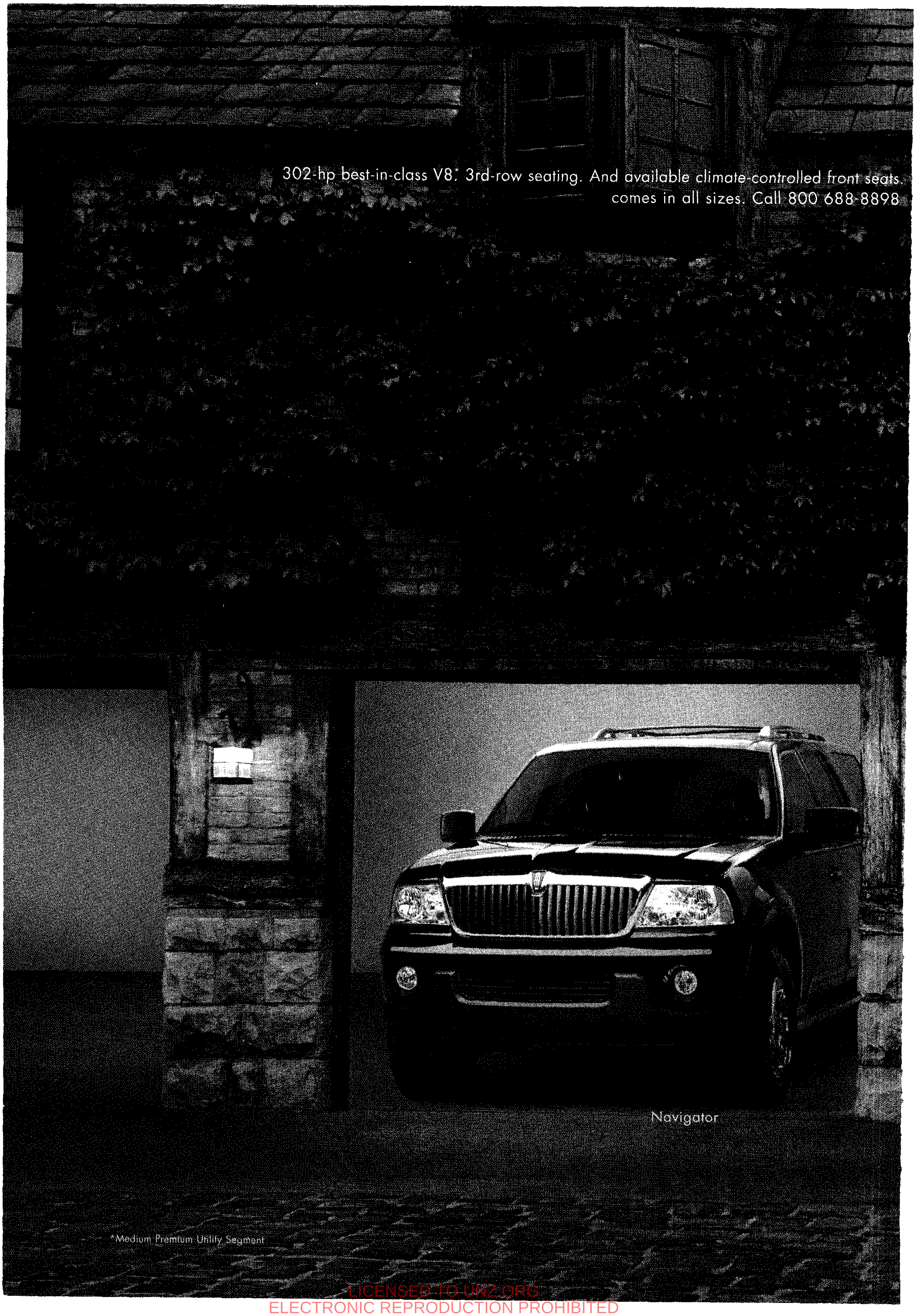
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Jan. 10: The **Tony Levin Band.** Levin, a shy and esteemed bass player, is best known for his work with King Crimson and Peter Gabriel. Levin lives to expand what his instrument can do. In addition to being a master of the ten-string Chapman stick, he's developed "funk fingers," a pair of small drumsticks he attaches to his fingers while playing a custom-made three-string bass. Jan. 11: **Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks.** The sexagenarian Hicks has probably lost all hope of being recognized as anything but a cult legend. One of pop's finest eccentrics, he spent most of the sixties and seventies as a Bay Area subversive, making disarmingly pungent country-flavored rock and pushing acoustic music into uncharted territory. Hicks basically sat out the eighties and most of the nineties, but over the past few years he's been reclaiming his dyspeptic niche in the rock-and-roll pantheon. With the **Savoy-Doucet Cajun Band** (see Concerts).

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Jan. 10: Half a decade before the advent of slacker culture, the prototypical college band **Camper Van Beethoven** mixed elements of folk, ska, world beat, and psychedelia in an eclectically charming hodgepodge. The lead singer-songwriter David Lowery held everything together with his dry, absurdist wit, but by the end of the eighties the jokes had worn thin and Lowery had moved on to the equally wry but not quite as adventurous Cracker. Briefly reuniting to promote the release of its long-lost, track-by-track cover album of Fleetwood Mac's "Tusk," Camper Van Beethoven rides again.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Jan. 10: **Joseph Arthur,** whose claim to fame was being the first pop act on Peter Gabriel's globe-trotting label Real World. As you might expect, this singer-songwriter shares his mentor's flair for moody grooves and inspired arrangements. On his latest release, "Redemption's Son," Arthur displays his knack for atmospheric production and lonely lyrics.



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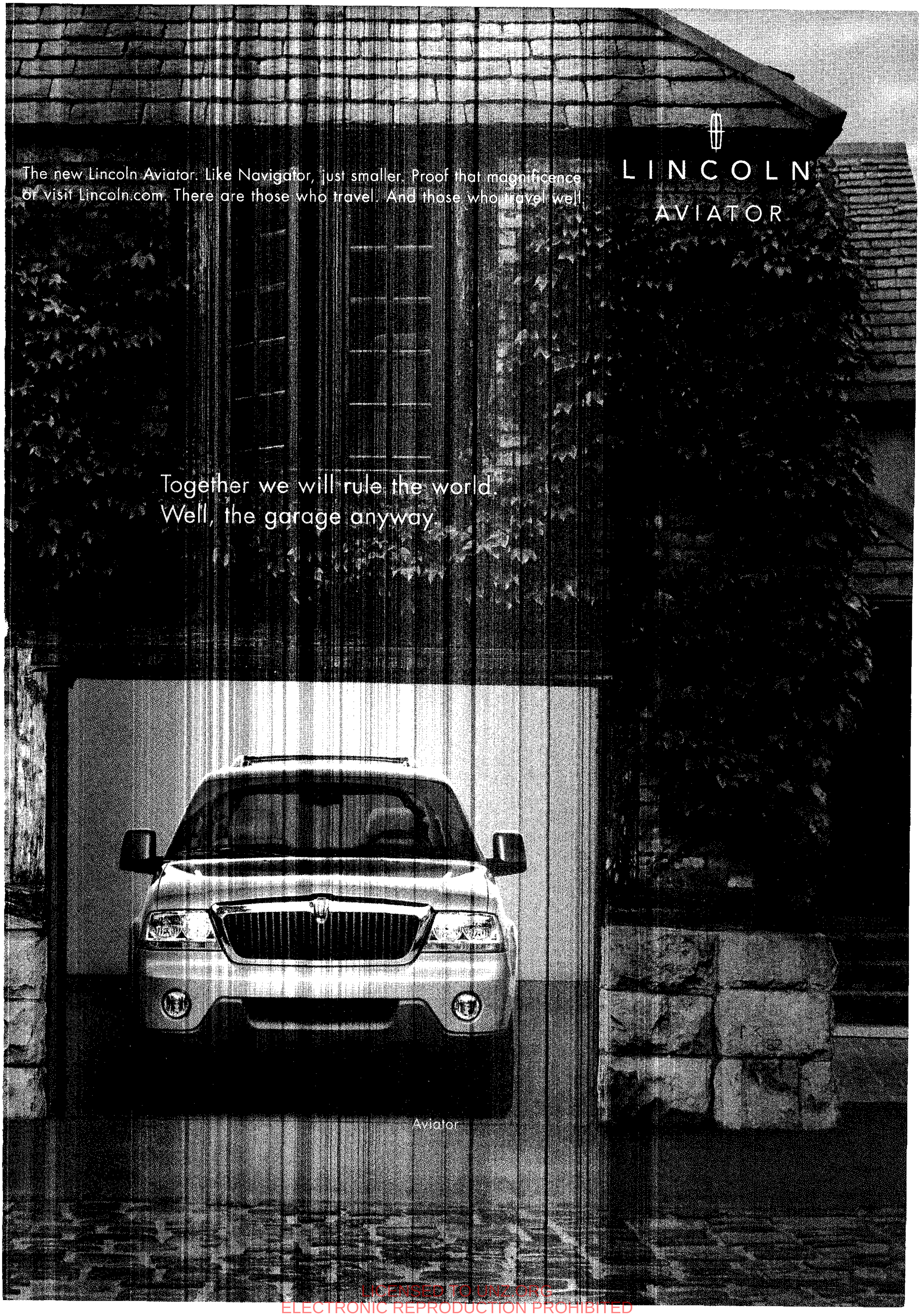
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MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—Jan. 8: **Interpol** harks back to the bygone eighties, minus an annoying retro-kitsch vibe. The locals evoke that era's post-punk godhead, Joy Division, in their stark tone and sharp-dressed sombreness. Though not the only troupe of backward-looking New Yorkers (given the Strokes' appropriation of the grubby CBGBs chic, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' "No Wave" bluntness, and the Rapture's affection for angular Gang of Fourisms), Interpol conjure an affected gloom without sounding dated.

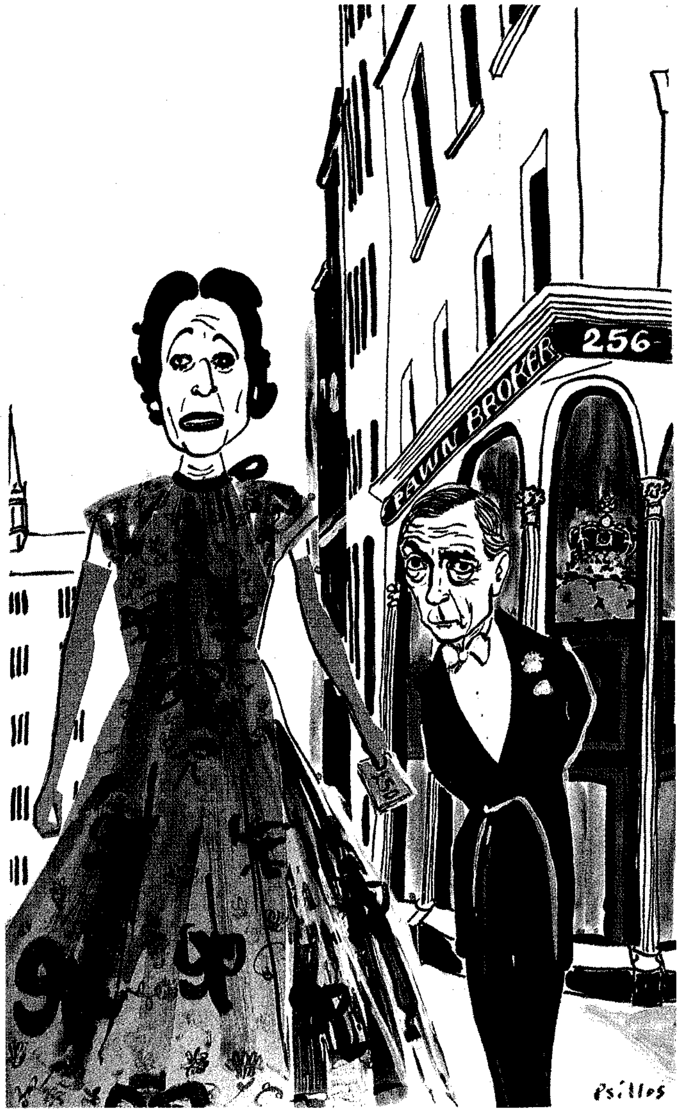
MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Jan. 11: **Antibalas** is a multiracial Afro-beat ensemble from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which takes its musical and political inspiration from Fela Kuti. Its live show—a thunderous mass of rhythms, horns, and bass—can't be beat.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg (718-599-5103)—Jan. 10: A stentorian reminder of what the Lower East Side was like before the wine bars moved in, the cacophonous power trio known as **Unsane** have reformed to once again bludgeon their instruments and pummel eardrums into submission. It sounds as if the 1989 Tompkins Square riots never ended. Opening these dour proceedings are the **Brought Low,** a Brooklyn trio who practice stripped-down seventies-styled rock with an accent on the groove rather than the grind.

OTTO'S SHRUNKEN HEAD
538 E. 14th St. (228-2240)—The **Moonlighters** are a charming local band (two singers, two ukuleles, an upright bass, and a steel guitar, the last played exquisitely by former Helmet bassist Henry Bogdan) with a penchant for swinging Hawaiian tunes from the twenties and thirties such as "Hula Blues" and "Honolulu March," along with a few originals in the same style. They're here keeping folks warm on Thursday nights in January.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope (718-230-0236)—Jan. 10: **Antibalas** (see the Mercury Lounge.)

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Jan. 11: The Brazilian guitarist **Vinicius Cantuária** spent the early part of his career writing songs for such compatriot superstars as Caetano Veloso and Gal Costa. More recently, though, he's been rubbing elbows with a radical set of New York City musicians, including Bill Frisell, Arto Lindsay, David Byrne, and Laurie Anderson. Cantuária's subtly adventurous take on bossa nova makes for softly stirring performances.



Outfits of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, at the Met.

DEMETRIOS PSILLOS

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The cabaret icon **Andrea Marcovicci,** currently at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room, is performing the can't-lose love songs of Cole Porter through Jan. 12. Dining.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Jan. 8: Her longtime gig at Bemelmans Bar now just a pleasant memory, **Barbara Carroll** has moved on to a new haunt. Her sly piano (when she was young, Carroll drew attention on Fifty-second Street, where the likes of Charlie Parker would sit in with her), subtle vocalizing, and encyclopedic knowledge of standards make for a civilizing night out. Jan. 9-11: There are few authentic bebop singers still with us; **Mark Murphy,** active since the mid-fifties, has not only never given up the cause, he's at the top of his game. Jan. 12: **Joe Lovano** performs an early set. Don't try to second-guess Lovano. This brilliant saxophonist has so many conceptual tricks up his sleeve that each of his recordings hits like a bolt from the blue, yet hearing him swing in a club setting carries its own immense pleasures. The **Chico O'Farrill Afro-Cuban Jazz Big Band** takes over for the late show on Jan. 12. The **Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra** is in on Mondays.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Jan. 12: You'd be hard pressed to find a recording under **Nicholas Payton's** own name that fully represents his potential, but this rip-snorting trumpeter with a New Orleans-meets-Fifty-second Street bop sensibility can be a monster in concert. With the **Danilo Perez** trio. The pianist Perez's contribution to Wayne Shorter's recent "Footprints Live!" album is a thing of beauty. Goading the saxophonist on with peppery chords, his rhythms and accents spiky and unpredictable, Perez nearly claims the recording as his own. An early proponent of the new Latin-jazz movement, this stirring improviser is at the forefront of what might be a significant change in contemporary jazz.

CAJUN
129 Eighth Ave., at 16th St. (691-6174)—It's not as if **Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks** are obsessed with the music of the twenties and thirties—they've even been known to slip in a number or two from the forties as well. Manning the most unwieldy of instruments (bass, tuba, bass saxophone) as well as a bulbous vintage Kellogg microphone, Giordano leads a tuxedo-clad twelve-piece band whose ease with early jazz and swing breathes life into an overlooked era. Authenticity and affection, rather than nostalgia and affectation, are what power this valuable and enjoyable ensemble. They're here on Mondays and Thursdays. The rest of the week features combos fluent in Dixieland jazz and other improvisational sounds of New Orleans.

FIREBIRD
365 W. 46th St. (586-0244)—Wednesdays and Thursdays through Jan. 25: The comedian and entertainer **Mark Nadler,** a man who has accompanied the drag performer Dame Edna on Broadway and who is known for tap dancing and playing the piano at the same time, performs a program called "Tchaikowsky (and Other Russians)," in which he promises to spend the evening humorously deconstructing the Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin song.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through Jan. 13: The **Gonzalo Rubalcaba** trio. How the Cuban expatriate Rubalcaba ditched a tropical climate only to get mellower and more relaxed in the United States is anyone's guess. Where this reformed keyboard abuser once crammed in forty notes when four were called for, he now savors the joys of concision, jettisoning technique for personality. Having **Ignacio Berroa,** one of the unsung giants of jazz drumming, on his team hasn't hurt a bit either. The saxophonist **David Sanchez** joins him here. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Jan. 8-11: **Donald Harrison's Congo Nation Tribe.** Harrison may have come to fame as one of the earliest neo-traditionalists to follow Wynton Marsalis's lead, but the saxophonist has since become a card-carrying inclusionist. He's ever ready to mix funk, reggae, gospel, and the street rhythms of his native New Orleans into his infectious musical blend. Jan. 12: **Terence Blanchard.** It's always good to be reminded that before he became Spike Lee's composer of choice (most recently for "25th Hour"), Terence Blanchard was—and remains—a whirlwind post-bop trumpeter who has grown increasingly lyrical with the years. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Jan. 11-14: **David Murray Latin Big Band.** Whatever big band Murray happens to convene becomes an extension of his brawny, free-wheeling saxophone playing. These enlarged ensembles invariably recall the invention and enveloping energy of Murray's breakthrough years in the early eighties.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Jan. 12: The **Paul Motian Electric Bebop Band.** Having helped alter the entire conception of conventional jazz drumming as we know it, Motian shouldn't be expected to get all reverential when it comes to playing bebop. The innovative percussionist's foray into the jazz past is usually fleshed out by two electric guitarists, an electric bass, and two saxophonists. Their heft is balanced by the leader's blissfully twisted swing. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—When Winston Churchill said, "Let us brace ourselves to our duties," he may not have meant "Let us tighten the corset in our pink organza gown." But in the years leading up to the Second World War, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were doing just that, leading a life of extravagant frivolity across the English Channel in Paris. **"Blithe Spirit: The Windsor Set"** presents French couture, including fashions by Lanvin, Chanel, and Schiaparelli, created for British café society between 1935 and 1940. Most of the clothes are nothing more than beautifully tailored evening wear, but certain designers manage to slip a little subversiveness into their creations, as in the Mainbocher dress that portends impending chaos through layers of faded and shredded tulle and lace. Through Feb. 9. ♦ **"The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353."** From a show named after a man on the move, you'd expect what? Gilded tent flaps? They're here, but the focus is on an urbane, nearly hundred-year dynasty that was founded in Iran by Hülegü, a grandson of Genghis. Ceremonial and decorative objects and lots of illustrated manuscripts—not to mention dauntingly profuse curatorial wall texts—document a cosmopolitan milieu in which Islamic styles got infused with Chinese ideas. Educational. Through Feb. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (708-9400)—**"Masterworks of German Expressionism"** presents twenty prints by members of the Brücke group, including Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, and Max Pechstein, as well as artists working between the World Wars, such as Max Beckmann and Käthe Kollwitz. Through Feb. 24. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—In one projection in **"Going Forth by Day,"** Bill Viola's visually striking five-channel video piece commissioned by a German bank for the Guggenheim Berlin, an eclectic procession traipses through a light-dappled forest (the panoramic image evokes old-fashioned CinemaScope). In an adjacent scene, water gushes from the windows and doors of a pristine building façade. Death and resurrection figure elsewhere in the action, as Viola tackles Big Themes. Through Jan. 12. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Although Gee's Bend, Alabama, is isolated by poverty and a sharp curve in the Alabama River, the group of hamlets there has for generations fostered quilt-making as a virtuoso performance in frugality. Sixty-nine handsewn quilts, dating from the thirties to the present and incorporating a wild variety of geometries, colors, and fabrics, are on view. Though the women of the African-American community—many of them members of the local Pettway clan—quilt and sing together (a documentary film showing continuously in the gallery broadcasts the sewing circles' amazing harmonies), no two quilts are alike. Each woman has a fiercely individual approach. The visual compositions are electric with abstraction of the most visceral sort, aesthetically inventive and born of necessity. Through March 2. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The family photographs hung in the first rooms of **"Einstein"** show the future *Time* Person of the Century at twenty-six, looking less like Yahoo Serious than like Alfred E. Neuman in a sombre moment. The still-impish genius had already produced the longhand draft of the theory of relativity framed here; upon later reducing it to $E = MC^2$, he wondered if "the Lord is laughing . . . and has played a trick on me." Display cases full of pipes, Nobel Prize medals, and papers—including letters to mistresses, Presidents, and schoolchildren, and one businesslike note graciously declining the Presidency of Israel—generously illustrate his outsized personality and work. Blinking electronic constructions take a stab at explaining the influential theories, but it's the everyday items that stick with you, such as his mother's note complaining that Alfie's visits home brought so much laughter and music-making into the house that she couldn't get anything done. Through Aug. 10. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (849-8300)—**"New Hotels for Global Nomads"** surveys a dizzying range of options for travellers, from the palatial interior of the world's tallest hotel, the Burj al-Arab in Dubai, where the standard room goes for two thousand dollars a night (for seven million, you get a thousand and one nights), to the snug, form-fitting pods where salarymen, ecotourists, and astronauts sleep. Curator Donald Albrecht is clearly infatuated by his subject, and the result is a slightly breathless, digressive show. There are lots of striking projects and quirky details—you can screen a movie while wearing a pair of Eye-trek glasses or sigh over an actual heart-shaped bathtub from Mount Airy Lodge. But the oversupply of curatorial side dishes—music videos, art installations, a huge wall of kitsch postcards—creates an impression of amiable hospitality rather than discernment. Through March 2. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays, 10 to 6; and Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ANDRÁS BÖRÖCZ
For ten years, this Hungarian-born artist has been making eccentric folk-modernist tableaux out of nothing but pencils: colored pencils, carpenter's pencils, ordinary yellow ones with their fezlike pink erasers. Set within all-pencil stage sets, his slim personages play cards, perform circus tricks, and work at (what else?) drawing boards. Böröcz's whimsy has a self-consciously slender charm, not so far from Saul Steinberg's. Non-pencil-based sculptures, on Purim themes, push closer to straight folk art. Through Jan. 25. (Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 861-7338.)

"ITALIAN SCULPTURE FROM THE GOTHIC TO THE BAROQUE"
Accompanied by not one but two catalogues, this heavyweight show offers a profusion of gleaming saints, cherubs, and crucifixions, the kind of art not usually seen outside the confines of museums. The earliest works are sweetly sturdy figures by Giotto's contemporary Tino de Camaino. The latest is a single recently discovered clay *modello* by Bernini for the Fountain of the Moor in Rome. Pouting, buffed, perched on a swirling wave, Bernini's version of Neptune is an over-the-top instance of testosterone rapture, a flash card for baroque glamour and excess. In between, there are more than thirty often breathtaking works by the likes of Nino Pisano, Francesco da Sangallo, and Andrea Della Robia. Through Feb. 1. (Salander O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606.)

Short List

AL HELD / GEORGE SUGARMAN
Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780.
Through Jan. 25.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

KUTLUG ATAMAN
John LaRoche, the orchid thief immortalized in these pages by Susan Orlean, has found a rival in Veronica Read, a British horticulturist (and the subject of Ataman's video installation) who is so obsessed with one species of amaryllis that she shares her two-bedroom home with nine hundred specimens. Ataman seems more interested in the foibles of human character than in plant life, though viewers of this four-channel piece—one tape for every season—may learn more about mite infestation than they ever cared to know. Through Jan. 11. (Lehman Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 255-2923.)

JEAN-MARC BUSTAMANTE
The French artist takes pictures of the area between city and country he calls "decivilization" (we call it the suburbs). He says he's trying to produce work without qualities; he succeeds in large-scale landscapes of Japan and Switzerland. Aside from a distant Alp or blink-and-you-miss-it roadside shrine, the two countries are as indistinguishable as strip malls. But details like a red plastic slide in a stagnant swimming pool reveal a beauty lurking within the banal. Less interesting are wall-mounted Plexiglas sculptures silk-screened with images based on abstract doodles. They'd look better if they'd stayed on cocktail napkins. Through Feb. 15. (Matthew Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200.)

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY
Hundreds of sound- and music-related film clips—from the duelling banjos in "Deliverance" to the fiddler-on-the-roof scene in "Fiddler on the Roof"—make up this deliriously intricate, intensely entertaining four-part projection. Structured in movements like a musical composition, the piece opens with single notes being plucked out on pianos, including, inevitably, the one from "The Piano." The

TABLES FOR TWO

ZUM SCHNEIDER
107 Avenue C, at 7th St. (598-1098)—It's rare that patrons of a New York restaurant resemble lumberjacks taking a break from sawing and chopping, but those are the sort of men who turn up, flashing plaid flannel, at an East Village German restaurant called Zum Schneider. They're often joined by fresh-faced women who look like they've just descended an Alp, but Mondays through Wednesdays, the men tend to shun female company—the better to make use of the foosball machine in one of the restaurant's two cavernous rooms.

Sylvester Schneider created Zum Schneider two years ago to evoke the macho gusto of his native Munich: "I did it because of homesickness," he says. When he couldn't find room for an outdoor beer garden, he took the party inside. The place has vaulted ceilings, and an archway garlanded with ivy divides the space. Gingerbready wooden window frames lend a fairytale touch, and diners gather around long oaken tables, devouring sausage and drinking mugs of Bavarian beer on tap: light and dark lager, pilsner, and hefeweizen, as well as the northern brands Jever and Kölsch. The menu bursts with wurst—juicy veal *Weisswurst*, plump bratwurst, and thin *Schweinswuerst'l* (all from Schaller & Weber)—served with such German standards as *Blaukraut*, spaetzle, and hot, crispy *Reiberdatschi* (thick, oniony potato pancakes with applesauce). Other Teutonic stalwarts include schnitzel, *Schweinebraten*, and roast pork, which come bathed in tangy beer gravy. Something called *Schwammerlragout* is excellent: a bread dumpling bathed in a wine-and-cream sauce studded with slices of nutty mushroom.

Zum Schneider also serves the traditional German breakfast (*Frühstück*), seldom seen on these shores, which includes homemade chewy *Brötchen* (thick brown bread) and sweet butter, honey, jam, sliced cold cuts and ham, tart yellow cheese, pickles, and soft-boiled eggs. Skip the orange juice and have a mug of coffee, or—*warum nicht?*—a breakfast lager. It's the perfect start to a day of vigorous *Biervergnügen*. (Open daily for dinner and weekends for *Frühstück*. Entrées $9-$17.)

—*Liesl Schillinger*

piece builds from marching bands to Marilyn Monroe to a fevered crescendo as Carrie screams while Callas hits a high note. Through Jan. 25. (Paula Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

MATT MULLICAN
The artist may be best known for paintings that look like international signage, but since the late seventies he has undergone hypnosis as a form of performance art. One night in November, Mullican went into his first trance in this town since 1982 in front of a rapt (and occasionally alarmed) crowd at the Kern gallery. Viewers who missed the hour-and-fifteen-minute performance can watch it on tape and witness the artist's gut-wrenching (and ear-splitting) screams at the prospect of reëntry. Whether authentic or enacted, it's startling. Through Feb. 15. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 367-9663.)

BEAT STREULI
You can think of this Swiss artist's latest project as an update on street photography, as social realism, or as plain old people-watching. Streuli set up a video camera in different cities around the world, and then shot pedestrians doing their thing: walking, idling, talking, looking lost. The results, projected larger than life on paired screens, are modest and gorgeous. Thanks to the odd intimacy of the telephoto zoom, everything appears on one plane. Hair styles, windshields, T-shirts, and complexions jostle against each other, and social diversity begins to look like an unbeatable aesthetic proposition. Through Jan. 11. (Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 463-7372.)

Short List

CHUCK CLOSE
Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 421-3292.
Through Jan. 11.

YAYOI KUSAMA
Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 366-4774.
Through Jan. 25.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

PETER SORIANO
The mischievous polychrome sculptures cast from polyester resin suggest a line of tools designed by Arp for Gumby (despite their rigid material, the brightly colored biomorphic forms seem pliable). Most of the objects come outfitted with built-in handles, and the most elaborate installation comes with its own nylon straps and moving blanket. One semi-translucent blob the color of chewed bubble gum sprouts red nodules that look as if they were squeezed between the artist's fingers before being cast, like a mud-pie version of Rodin's hands. Through Jan. 25. (Lennon Weinberg, 560 Broadway. 941-0012.)

Short List

DAVID HAMMONS
Ace, 275 Hudson St. 255-5599. Through Feb. 1.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

DEWITT GODFREY / MEGAN FOSTER
Godfrey does a wryly organic take on the power-tool school of sculpture. His three flexible-steel cylinders in the gallery's small walled courtyard are big enough to walk through or across, and they seem to have moods. The largest (which is also the softest) is floppy; the tough short one braces its stocky shoulders against the others. With the first snow of the season, the big softie softened even more, runoff dripped rust past a stubble of stainless bolts, and six icicle mustaches formed, one at each mouth. Godfrey's wistful sculpture here sets sturdy industrialism into a surprisingly delicate dialogue with nature. Inside the gallery, Megan Foster's streamlined paintings of movie interiors manage to create a freeze-frame serenity out of restrained color and coloring-book-style outlines. Through Jan. 21. (Black and White, 483 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn. 718-599-8775.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

WALKER EVANS
Some of Evans's most revered and widely reproduced images of Depression-era sharecroppers and their wretched world pop up among these thirty-six duplicates from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. The iconic cross of light penetrating the doors of the haunted breakfast room of the Bell Grove Plantation is just as sinister as always; the renowned pathos of the barefoot boy in "Coal Miner's House, Scott's Run, West Virginia" is as ironic as ever. But right next to the acclaimed portrait of James Agee hang two less-exhibited profiles that show the writer even sadder and more isolated in his thoughts than usual. The seldom seen "Waterfront Poolroom, New York" oozes an ominous filth from stinking sidewalk to corroded awning. Yet the liquid blacks of this American ruin glow with the beauty of an Ashcan-school daguerreotype. Through Jan. 18. (Pace MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-8964.)

The pianist Cecile Licad performs at the Frick Collection on January 12.

LARA TOMLIN

ANDREW MOORE
Soviet Communism may now be a thing of the past, but the aesthetic associated with it—grim, towering blocks of gray apartment buildings, desolate landscapes with palettes of scabby greens and browns—persists in the West's visual imagination. Moore, whose previous show of Havana interiors was so colorful and buoyant that it made Communism seem like a great thing (from an aesthetic standpoint, at least) here ventures beyond the expected pictorial representations of Russia to give us instead images of giddy beauty and majesty. In "Rotari's Gallery, Peterhof," a tall mirror, edged with baroque gold curlicues, is flanked by portraits of ivory-skinned Russian beauties; the room positively froths with Romanovian excess. The landscapes—with their elegant, unpeopled silence—will remind viewers of Candida Hofer's perfect interiors. In taking Russia—its contradictions and gorgeous ruins—at face value, he captures a country's diversity and history in a mere nine images. Through Jan. 25. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

"PHOTOGRAPHY PAST/FORWARD: APERTURE AT 50"
As the culmination of its fiftieth-anniversary party, *Aperture* has gathered together the classic work of its own photographers that was strewn around the city last October. A true *Who's Who* of photojournalism and work of an artier stripe will be shown, including pieces by Bernd and Hilda Becher, Mary Ellen Mark, Man Ray, Lorna Simpson, Robert Mapplethorpe, Lázló Moholy-Nagy, and *Aperture's* founders, Ansel Adams, Minor White, and Dorothea Lange. Through Jan. 31. (Sotheby's, 1334 York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—**"Time of Change."** This tiny gem of a show couldn't be better timed. There are only twenty-five pictures here, taken between 1961 and 1965, of a few earthshaking moments and other, quieter moments in the Civil Rights movement. Bruce Davidson rode with the Freedom Riders from Montgomery to Jackson and snapped a regal young black woman lost in song as the National Guard and angry white hecklers massed just outside her bus window. He was in Kelly Ingram Park as Bull Connor turned the fire hoses on the protesters in Birmingham and lost in the crowd on the Mall as Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. Davidson's picture of a car with a blood-soaked front seat, in which Viola Liuzzo was shot to death by Klansmen, is devastating in its banal finality. A straightforward portrait of a schoolgirl with a plastic raincoat covering her Sunday best oozes with the stoic dignity and anger that took the marchers forward. ♦ **"Weegee's Trick Photography."** Both shows through Feb. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

F. & D. CARTIER
Milo, 552 W. 24th St. 414-0370. Through Jan. 11.

DAN ESTABROOK
Morthland, 511 W. 25th St. 242-7767.
Through Jan. 11.

NICK HOOKER
Briggs Robinson, 527 W. 29th St. 560-9075.
Through Jan. 11.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
Jan. 13 at 2: The house begins the New Year with a sale of American Indian art, a prelude to the cascade of Americana that hits the city next week. A variety of dolls, baskets, pottery, and textiles from Southwestern tribes (including a Zuni polychrome jar with a rainbird design, expected to bring up to eighteen thousand dollars) are included, along with a selection of weapons, clothing, and ceremonial objects from Alaska, the Northeast, and the Great Plains. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

DOYLE
Jan. 8 at 10 A.M.: A sale of furniture, paintings, and decorations, along with a variety of prints, porcelain, silver, and rugs. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

SWANN
Jan. 9 at 10:30 A.M.: The annual "discovery sale," a selection of more than two hundred lots of prints, posters, and photographs, all at moderate prices. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Sonja Frisell's 1988 staging of **"Aida"** is the crown jewel among the Met's more conservative productions. Its breathtaking sets and resplendent costumes, executed with a keen eye for historical detail, create a

world that matches the grandeur and mystery of Verdi's music—and transcends the star power of any particular cast. (Even the dancing is topnotch.) Marco Armiliato has been taking care of the show this season, conducting with a strength and dedication that more than compensates for any lack of subtlety; his latest cast, an impressive one, includes Hasmik Papian (in the title role), Larissa Diadkova, Richard Margison, Mark Delavan, and Robert Lloyd. (Jan. 8 and Jan. 11 at 8.) ♦ Franco Zeffirelli may have shown an admirable restraint in his 1990 period-style production of **"Don Giovanni,"** but such an approach can harshly expose the weaknesses of even a first-rate cast. Dmitri Hvorostovsky plays the Don with an equal mixture of elegance and threat, and Barbara Frittoli, her voice revealing a lovely hint of Callas-like tone, sings the role of Donna Anna with force and beauty, yet both seem to be saving their all for some lucky future audience. Michael Schade is a superb lyric tenor in the German mold, but he lacks the low notes for Don Ottavio, and Carol Vaness, while always sympathetic as Donna Elvira, needs to bring some focus to an increasingly squally voice. (The conducting of Sylvain Cambreling is intelligent and assured, but he is not the shaping force that this august work really needs.) On the other hand, Richard Bernstein brings a vigorous baritone and fine comic timing to the role of Leporello, and Rebecca Evans and Oren Gradus make for a very appealing Zerlina and Masetto. Kurt Moll sings the role of the Commendatore. (Jan. 9 at 8.) ♦ **"Carmen,"** with Denyce Graves (in the title role), Neil Shicoff, Pamela Armstrong, and Ludovic Tézier; Yves Abel conducts. (Jan. 10 at 8.) ♦ With Mary Dunleavy replacing Armstrong. (Jan. 14 at 8.) ♦ Strauss's **"Die Fledermaus"** completes its holiday run, with a cast that includes Solveig Kringelborn, Rosemary Joshua, Jennifer Larmore, David Kuebler, and Paul Charles Clarke; Philippe Jordan. (Jan. 11 at 1:30.) ♦ While not the earliest of Janáček's operas, **"Jenůfa"** (completed, after a long creative struggle, in 1904) is the first in which his mature style came together—passionate vocal lines underpinned by the quirky, ear-catching rhythms of Czech speech patterns, borne aloft by an orchestral stream of nervous, shimmering lyricism. It's also the earliest one for which the crowds still gather, and for its new production (by Olivier Tambosi) the house offers a cast headed by Karita Mattila (in the title role), Deborah Polaski, Kim Begley, and Christopher Ventris; Vladimir Jurowski conducts Charles Mackerras's critical edition of the score. (Jan. 13 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

MANNES OPERA

Joseph Colaneri, conducting the Mannes Orchestra, is the music director for a program of semi-staged scenes from "Così Fan Tutte," "Don Pasquale," and other operas. (Concert Hall, Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. For free tickets, which are required, call 712-1973. Jan. 9-10 at 7:30.)

NINE CIRCLES CHAMBER THEATRE: "THE ART OF THE FUGITIVE"

Paul Celan spent his life trying to come to terms with the Holocaust (which he barely survived), the dark matter that infuses such poems as "Stretto" and "Death Fugue." In "The Paradoxical Life of Paul Celan," the subtitle of this new music-theatre work, the director Jonathan Levi and the violinist and music director Gil Morgenstern have crafted a dramatic dialogue between Celan's writings and musical selections by Bach (the Chaconne for violin, and excerpts from "The Art of Fugue") and Messiaen (from "Quartet for the End of Time") which match their spiritual rigor and intellectual force. (In addition, a new work by Bruce Saylor has been commissioned for the show.) The actor Fred Sanders portrays the poet, interacting onstage with Morgenstern, the clarinettist Jean Kopperud, and other musicians. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. Jan. 13 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

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the door; Sibelius's Violin Concerto provides an appropriate vehicle for the début of the young German violinist Julia Fischer; and Stravinsky's "Petrushka" (in the 1911 version), still a challenge to the greatest ensembles, shows off Maazel's most striking talent—conducting the most complex modern scores with élan and expertise. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5656. Jan. 9 and Jan. 14 at 7:30 and Jan. 11 at 8.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: "BRUCKNER'S JOURNEY"
Two passions dominated the simple life of Anton Bruckner: composing for large orchestras and devoutly practicing his Roman Catholic faith. Leon Botstein conducts two rarely performed works from the composer's Linz period, in the eighteen-sixties, which illuminate both parts of his life—the Symphony No. 1 in C Minor and the Mass No. 3 in F Minor—in their revised "Vienna" versions, from many years later. The vocal soloists include the soprano Meagan Miller and the tenor Richard Clement. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Jan. 10 at 8.)

SINFONIA VARSOVIA
The velvety and incomparably rich contralto voice of Ewa Podleś is the big draw for this concert by the Polish ensemble, in which she sings three orchestral songs by Szymanowski. Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony and Piano Concerto No. 2 (with the pianist Ian Hobson, who also conducts) complete the program. (Carnegie Hall. 247-4800. Jan. 12 at 2.)

FINNISH RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Jukka-Pekka Saraste (who was the orchestra's music director for fourteen years) leads the ensemble in its New York début, conducting music by Sibelius (the Fifth Symphony), Beethoven (the Third Piano Concerto, with Till Fellner), and his distinguished Finnish colleague Esa-Pekka Salonen. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Jan. 12 at 3.)

RECITALS

MUSIC AT BRUNO WALTER AUDITORIUM
This comfortable, slightly out-of-the-way venue, situated on the Amsterdam Avenue side of Lincoln Center, is the site of an ongoing series of free concerts presented by the New York Public Library. Two very different pianists appear this week. Jan. 9 at 6:30: Grant Johannesen, a distinguished veteran who likes to pepper his programs with a bit of the unexpected, plays music by Chávez, Stravinsky, and de Severac, as well as by Bach, Schubert, and Schumann. Winona and Nathan Fifield, on violin and piano, are his guests. ♦ Jan. 11 at 3: Kathleen Supové, one of downtown's leading advocates of way-out repertory, performs "Jitters," a solo music-theatre work by Randall Woolf that incorporates several texts (on string theory and Sufi mysticism) by Valeria Vasilevski. (40 Lincoln Center Plaza. No tickets required.)

BARGEMUSIC
Jan. 9-10 at 7:30: Music in minor keys by Bach, Chopin (the lilting Sonata for Cello and Piano), and Mendelssohn (the Piano Trio No. 1), played by the violinist Mark Peskanov, the cellist Edward Arron, and the pianist Andrew Armstrong. ♦ Jan. 11 at 7:30 and Jan. 12 at 4: A more enterprising program of Beethoven, Debussy (the Cello Sonata), more Mendelssohn (the very early Piano Quartet in F Minor), and Carter (the Piano Sonata), performed by Peskanov, the pianist Steven Beck, and others. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

"INTERPRETATIONS" SERIES: ANTHONY COLEMAN / BOB OSTERTAG
Color, seen and unseen, is a common theme for the music-and-multimedia series' latest concert. Coleman, a longtime staple of the downtown avant-jazz scene, is the pianist for the première of "Pushy Blueness" (an homage to Barnett Newman) and several more of his works, performing with the bassist Mark Dresser, the guitarist Marc Ribot, and other musicians. Ostertag, the San Francisco-based digital sampling artist and political activist, completes the program with "Between Science and Garbage," a work with live-animation visuals created by the filmmaker Pierre Hébert. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 9 at 8.)

FREDERIC CHIU: "PROKOFIEV IN THREE ACTS"
In the second of three short recitals with discussions, the young American pianist brings his smart and lucid style to the Sonata No. 7, the second of the composer's three "War Sonatas." (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 570-3949. Jan. 10 at 7.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
In its annual tribute to its founding director, the avuncular keyboardist Charles Wadsworth, the Society presents a concert of vocal and instrumental music by Bach, Handel, Rachmaninoff (several songs with violin obbligato), Schumann (the Quartet in A Minor), and Golijov (the New York première of "Tenebrae"), performed by Wadsworth, the soprano Courtenay Budd, the St. Lawrence String Quartet, and others. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5788. Jan. 10 at 8 and Jan. 12 at 5.)

GUARNERI STRING QUARTET
Performing quartets by Schumann, Beethoven (the "Harp," Op. 74), and Lukas Foss. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 570-3949. Jan. 11 at 8.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ENSEMBLES
Musicians from the orchestra (including the clarinettist Stanley Drucker and the cellist Eric Bartlett) play pieces by Milhaud, Jongen, and Beethoven (the Septet). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 12 at 3.)

CECILE LICAD
After winning the gold medal in the Leventritt piano competition in 1981, Licad, a protégée of Serkin, Lipkin, and Horszowski, made the rounds of the great orchestras, collaborated frequently with the violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, and snagged a recording contract with a major label. The nineties were a quieter decade for her, but she has endured as a pianist's pianist, an artist of clarity and strength who stays close to the classic repertory. In a solo recital at the Frick Collection, she plays music by Schubert, Liszt (including Busoni's arrangement of the first "Mephisto Waltz"), and Chopin (the Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor and other works). (1 E. 79th St. 228-0700. Jan. 12 at 5.)

DMITRI HVOROSTOVSKY
The commanding Russian baritone performs a program of songs by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff at the Temple of Dendur. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 570-3949. Jan. 12 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
Jan. 9 at 7: Tatyana Tolstaya reads from her novel, "The Slynx." (Housing Works Used Book Café, 126 Crosby St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Jan. 13 at 7:30: Verlyn Klinkenborg offers passages from "The Rural Life," his account of country living. (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
Jan. 10 at 7: Seth Tobocman, Mac McGill, Peter Kuper, and Art Spiegelman share their contributions to the latest issue of the protest-oriented comic book "World War Three Illustrated." (Theatre for the New City, First Ave. at 10th St. 254-1109.) ♦ Jan. 12 at 2: Ilana Abramovitch, a co-editor of the four-hundred-page reference book "Jews of Brooklyn," talks about the history of Flatbush, Borough Park, and other Kings County neighborhoods. (Central Synagogue Community House, 123 E. 55th St. 415-5544.) ♦ Jan. 14 at 6:30: The critic Joan Acocella joins Ruth Franklin, an editor at the *New Republic*, the history professor Peter Gay, and the novelist Thane Rosenbaum to discuss the new translation of Joseph Roth's essays, "What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933." The actor Paul Hecht will also read from the collection. (Goethe-Institut New York, 1014 Fifth Ave., between 82nd and 83rd Sts. For reservations, which are required, call 794-2851.)

BOOK CURRENTS

The Man Behind Don Juan

In the summer of 1938, a hundred and fourteen years after Lord Byron's nearly mythic death at Missolonghi, an intrepid vicar at the parish church of Hucknall Torkard and a small band of stalwarts decided to pay a visit to the poet of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" and "Don Juan" where he lay in the Byron family vault. The vicar and his crew were pleased to find, upon gingerly raising the coffin lid, that Byron had weathered the intervening years remarkably well. "The slightly protruding lip and curly hair were easily recognizable," reported an awestruck church caretaker. The incident—perhaps the most literal in a long line of Byronic exhumations and re-assessments—turns up in Fiona MacCarthy's whopping **BYRON: LIFE AND LEGEND** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), an appropriately sprawling volume devoted to the "first European cultural celebrity of the modern age." Like his twentieth-century counterpart, Elvis Presley, Byron continues to exert a necrophilic hold on the imagination, with his colossal and contradictory public image. MacCarthy's account gives us Byron in all his twisted glory: keeping a pet bear while at Cambridge, crisscrossing Europe in a monumental carriage modelled after Napoleon's, drinking claret out of a human skull, swimming the Hellespont despite a lame foot, and constantly hounded by the open secret of his bisexuality.

As David Crane's **THE KINDNESS OF SISTERS** (Knopf) makes clear, Byron was as maddening in love as he was in celebrity. Examining the understandably contentious relationship between Byron's wife, Annabella, and his half-sister (and lover), Augusta Leigh, Crane eloquently reminds us that there is "no English writer like him . . . no one who has so completely made his life the measure of his art."

—*Mark Rozzo*

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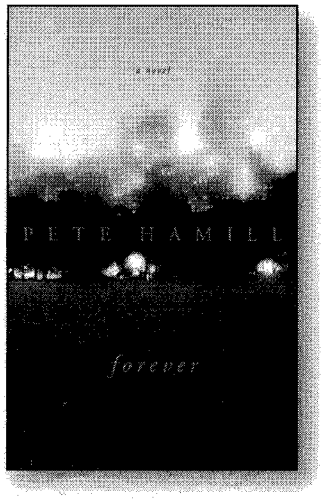

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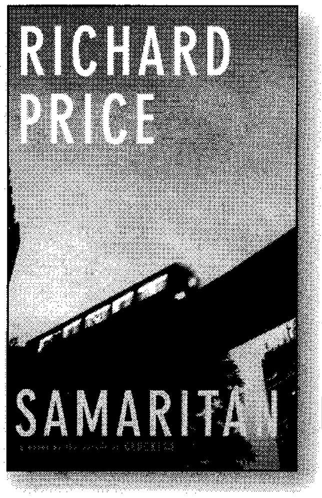

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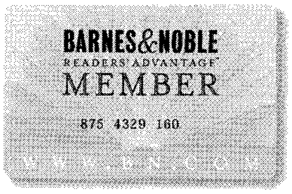

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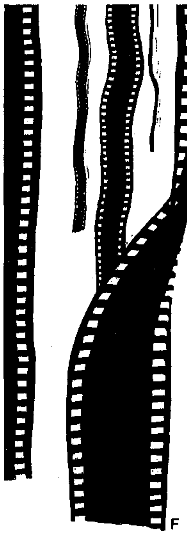
MOVIES OPENING

JUST MARRIED
Brittany Murphy and Ashton Kutcher play young newlyweds who embark on a disastrous honeymoon in Italy, in a comedy directed by Shawn Levy ("Big Fat Liar"). Opening Jan. 10.

THE SLAUGHTER RULE
Andrew and Alex Smith wrote and directed this drama about the life of an alienated Montana teen-ager (Ryan Gosling). Opening Jan. 8. (Pioneer.)

THE SON
A new film from Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne ("Rosetta") about a tragedy that links a carpentry teacher (Olivier Gourmet) to one of his juvenile-delinquent students (Morgan Marinne). In French. Opening Jan. 10. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

WXIII
An animated monster movie from Japan, directed by Takayama Fumihiko. Opening Jan. 10. (Empire 25.)



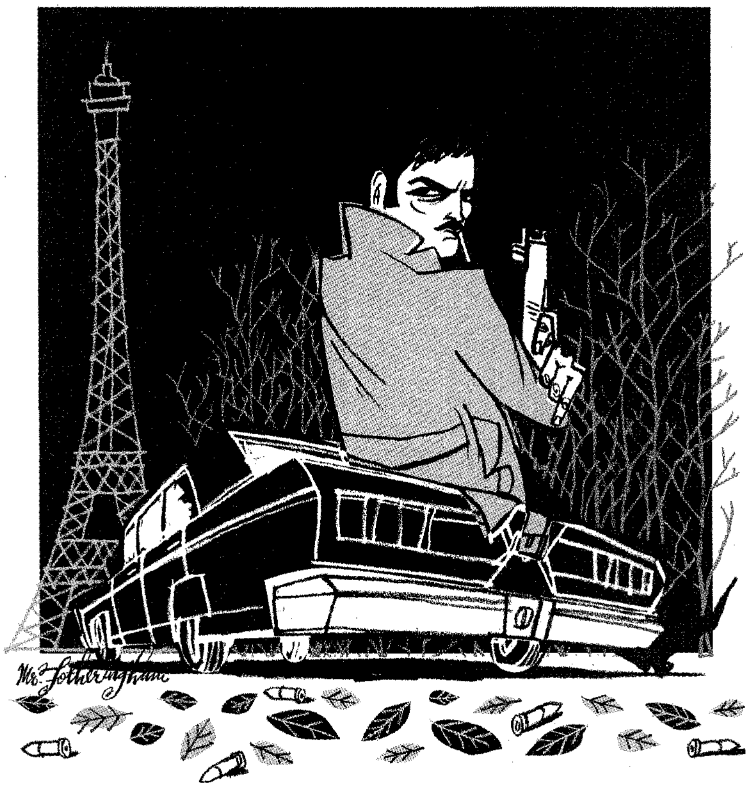
FILM NOTES

ABOUT SCHMIDT
Alexander Payne's last movie, "Election," was unpleasant, timely, and as sharp as a nib. His new movie is unpleasant, indecisive, and about as cheering as a damp fog. Jack Nicholson plays the eponymous Schmidt, who leaves a long career in insurance and slumps into graceless retirement. His wife (June Squibb) dies, whereupon his daughter (Hope Davis) takes over the household; soon enough, the aging male is left alone, and we are left to ponder the mismatch—unresolved by Payne—between Schmidt the early fusspot and Schmidt the emerging slob, with a riot of used food packaging at his feet. After that, the movie takes to the road, like a late, soft aftermath to "Five Easy Pieces." But the Nicholson of that film made hard choices; here he plays to the viewers' cultish worship of Jack the Lad, and even the saddest scenes have flourishes of rumpled clowning. A picture that aimed to celebrate a regular guy winds up endorsing his comic disdain for the stale lives around him. With Dermot Mulroney, Kathy Bates, and a hot tub that has seen it all.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/16/02.) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

ADAPTATION
The hero of the new experimental comedy by the writer Charlie Kaufman and the director Spike Jonze ("Being John Malkovich") is Kaufman himself, played by Nicolas Cage. He's in a dreadful quandary, having signed on to adapt Susan Orlean's "The Orchid Thief," which grew out of a 1995 article in this magazine. "Great sprawling *New Yorker* stuff," Charlie calls the book, by which he means it's a screenwriter's nightmare—ruminative, descriptive, but lacking the clear kind of "arc" that can be shovelled into a movie. Cage's Charlie, a malcontent who wears a flannel shirt in Los Angeles, works himself into a fury of self-loathing, and, for about an hour, the movie is a funny, deft metafiction that jumps back and forth among Charlie's feverish self-doubts, his erotic fantasies, and the story he is attempting to write. We see that story: Orlean (Meryl Streep) tags along with John Laroche (Chris Cooper), a Florida man who was arrested while stealing a rare form of orchid from a state wilderness preserve. Unsocialized but erudite, a moralist, a theorist, a swamp-bred crank, Laroche fascinates the melancholy Orlean, who feels her life lacks a consuming passion. The performances are all expert, especially Cooper's, but the movie takes a disastrous leap into melodrama at the end, which can be interpreted as either a sellout to Hollywood convention or a savage self-parody of selling out. Either way, it's a mistake.—*David Denby* (12/9/02) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinema, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Sunshine Cinema.)

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN
Leonardo DiCaprio is loose and easy—a movie star again after his grim encounter with "Gangs of New York"—in Steven Spielberg's charming comedy about a teen-age con man. When his businessman/scam-artist father (Christopher Walken) loses his grip, Frank W. Abagnale (DiCaprio), eager to restore the old guy's glory, slips into deception as a way of life, impersonating, serially, an airline pilot, a doctor, and a lawyer, kiting checks along the way and leading the F.B.I., in the person of Agent Hanratty (Tom Hanks), on a merry chase. Yet Hanratty, while pursuing Frank with Javert-like relentlessness, becomes fond of the young scoundrel. The movie is really about an amoral boy lucky enough to have two fathers, each with superb qualities. This real-life story (based on Abagnale's autobiography) is set in the sixties, and Spielberg has given it a sleek and carefree look. An expert and touching entertainment.—*D.D.* (12/23 & 30/02) (Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

LE CERCLE ROUGE
In this de-luxe piece of heist-film engineering from 1970, the writer-director Jean-Pierre Melville provides a satisfying payoff for the audience, if not the characters—according to the hardboiled karma of the plot, everyone winds up philosophical or dead. Just released ex-con Alain Delon and escaped prisoner Gian-Maria Volonté take turns saving each other's life and then enlist marksman Yves Montand to help them pull off a Paris jewelry-store robbery. Bourvil is the inspector on their trail, and François Périer the well-connected owner of an irresistible gangland night club. Volonté's juicy wildness as a self-proclaimed "amateur" and Montand's blowsy authority as an alcoholic help lubricate the plot; the lizards and insects of Montand's delirium-tremens scene presage "Celebrity Fear Factor." And with the help of the cinematographer Henri Decaë, Melville puts on a virtuoso display of the geometry of movie action, from the red circle of chalk Delon uses on a pool cue to the slashing lines he cuts in his blocky American car. In French.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Jan. 10-14.)



At Film Forum, Jean-Pierre Melville's "Le Cercle Rouge."

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

CHICAGO
The time is the nineteen-twenties, but the setting is so stylized, so shamelessly grounded in a hundred other shows and films, that "Chicago" barely qualifies as a period piece; indeed, it merrily jabs at the celebrity-lust of our own era. Catherine Zeta-Jones is Velma Kelly, and Renée Zellweger is Roxie Hart. Each is a man-killer, and each resides in jail, plotting her defense with the silken legal help of Billy Flynn (Richard Gere). The music and lyrics by Kander and Ebb operate on the old-fashioned principle that every song should be a showstopper, regardless of whether the show should be stopped. The director, Rob Marshall, cuts away furiously during every song, and this chronic wish to glance aside makes us wonder: could the performers not weather the camera's unstinting gaze? The only player to conquer the movie is Zeta-Jones, who gets by on a full tank of unleaded oomph. The film has punch, but it never really conveys the delicious, redeeming sense that life can be lived on the hoof.—*A.L.* (1/6/03) (Ziegfeld.)

THE CLOWNS
In the wonderful opening passage, Fellini recalls the clown acts of his youth and how they reflected village life. He gets at the connections between folk and folk art as well as something more subtle and elusive—the way a spectator's response to entertainment changes with maturity. Fellini admits that clowns terrified him as a child, but this 1971 film is suffused

with a loving fascination for them. It wobbles when Fellini plays himself as the leader of a bumbling documentary crew interviewing veteran zanies about their tradition. But the final sequence is enigmatically moving: a circus funeral followed by two clown trumpeters playing "Ebb Tide." In Italian.—*M.S.* (Gramercy Theatre; Jan. 10 and Jan. 12.)

CONFESSIONS OF A DANGEROUS MIND

Just as audiences are recovering from the multilayered madness of "Adaptation," here comes another Charlie Kaufman script. George Clooney directed, but this project is pure Kaufman: fact and fiction tossed in the blender together, with plenty of formal trickery. The story, or more precisely, the leaping-off point, is the autobiography of Chuck Barris, the producer who invented "The Dating Game," "The Newlywed Game," and "The Gong Show," which he also hosted. Then, there is this small matter of political assassinations: Barris claimed to be a C.I.A. hit man, tapped for various "wet" operations throughout his television career. Sam Rockwell plays Barris as a carnal, slightly crazed man who's also deeply insecure that he'll be remembered as a purveyor of trash. Is this what tipped him into his fantasy life? This nimble and free-spirited film doesn't say; it continually shifts perspective and plays with the mystery. In the end, it's a story of wayward ambition and an object lesson in what people will do when placed in front of a television camera. With Drew Barrymore and Julia Roberts, as the duelling women in Barris's life, and interviews with Dick Clark and other colleagues.—*Michael Agger* (Union Square.)

FAR FROM HEAVEN

An immaculate new movie from Todd Haynes, the purveyor of "Safe" and "Velvet Goldmine." This project teams him once again with Julianne Moore, who looks set to become the Catherine Deneuve to Haynes's Buñuel. Here she plays—or incarnates, to the last inch of her hemline—a wife and mother, living in Hartford in 1957. All is well, if brittle, until she drops by to see her husband (Dennis Quaid) in his office after hours, and finds him entwined with a man. From here on, their lives start to shred and scatter; she herself falls for the gardener (Dennis Haysbert), who is not only black but, to all appearances, perfect. With tact and care, the movie digs into all the subjects that lay concealed below the surface when Max Ophuls and Douglas Sirk were filming their own melodramas in the nineteen-fifties. As an exercise in style, it cannot be faulted, and Moore takes us by surprise, even by storm, with the wealth and fullness of her feeling; yet there remains something prim in the whole endeavor—we know better than these beleaguered people did, and the movie can hardly help congratulating us, and itself, on that knowledge.—*A.L.* (11/18/02) (Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Eastside Playhouse, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

GANGS OF NEW YORK

Daniel Day-Lewis, returning to movies after a spell of shoemaking in Florence, disports himself with royal assurance as the voluble thug William Cutting (Bill the Butcher) in Martin Scorsese's generally unsuccessful epic about nineteenth-century gang life in New York. Wielding knife and cleaver, this vengeful brawler makes spectacles of blood that he knows are gratifying to others. He's a self-amused monster, and Day-Lewis does what he can to give this semi-coherent production some theatrical panache. Scorsese and his screenwriters (Jay Cocks, Steven Zaillian, and Kenneth Lonergan) never succeed in linking together the intimate personal dramas and the endless gang war between the nativist Yankees (i.e., Protestants) and the new waves of Irish immigrants. The movie isn't boring, but it's heavy-spirited, obvious, and grisly, with an emphasis on knives and blood that borders on the fetishistic. Scorsese shot "Gangs" in Rome's Cinecittà, and the picture has some of the depressive feverishness of "Fellini Satyricon," which was also shot there—the jeering spectators mounted in multitiered sets, the furtive life of the crime-ridden metropolis, with its hapless poverty, its barbaric entertainments, its obscure and unredeemed suffering. The movie also stars a sullen, stolid Leonardo DiCaprio as a young Irish immigrant eager to avenge the death of his father, Cameron Diaz as a prostitute and pickpocket, Liam Neeson as a fallen Irish leader, and Jim Broadbent as the corrupt political boss William Tweed.—*D.D.* (12/23 & 30/02) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE HOURS

It has to overcome an over-all morbidity, a fractured time sequence, and Philip Glass's intrusive, chiming score, and, amazingly, it does. Stephen Daldry directed this adaptation of Michael Cunningham's prize-winning 1998 novel, from a script by David Hare. They've fashioned a lovely, serious work—as good as any recent "literary" movie—devoted to two themes, the variety of human bonds, especially the bond of love, and the gift that the dying make to the living. Nicole Kidman gives a revelatory performance as Virginia Woolf, both in 1923, at the time of writing "Mrs. Dalloway," and in 1941, when she loaded her coat with stones and walked into a river. Julianne Moore is a depressed Los Angeles housewife in 1951, and Meryl Streep plays a contemporary New York literary editor who hopes to give a party for a poet friend (Ed Harris) dying of AIDS. The widely separated episodes fit together as surely and lightly as dancers in a Balanchine ballet.—*D.D.* (12/23 & 30/02) (Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, and Union Square.)

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS

If Peter Jackson's movie were to map every detail of the Master's work, the result would be three years long. In the event, he's crunched and tidied Tolkien's second book into an easily digestible three hours. We get flying dragons, a breathless opening sequence in which Gandalf (Ian McKellen) plummets down a belching abyss, and Shadowfax, a flawless white horse who will gallop in from nowhere, though only in slow-motion. Then there is Gollum, as white-skinned and blue-veined as moldering cheese, a character who gives the movie a chance for psychological inquiry—the one thing it doesn't require. One of the restrictions and pleasures of an epic is that it both predates and outwits psychology. In addition, Gollum was forged on a computer, and his creators are so pleased with their baby that they can't help showing him off. This is a pity, and we may have to accept that, for those fooling around with brand-new technologies, the toys are simply too much fun. What allows Jackson to truly animate his pictures, even as they threaten to founder in fantastical gothic, is his knack for the telling gesture. And, when Gandalf arrives with reinforcements near the film's climax, the spirit of triumphant rampage is something rarely glimpsed since the days of Olivier and "Henry V." With Orlando Bloom, providing the movie's wildest cheers as the blond-tressed elf Legolas.—*A.L.* (1/6/03) (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

LOST HIGHWAY

David Lynch benefits from detailed locales like Twin Peaks or the show-biz Hollywood of Mulholland Drive: they provide the force of gravity when his imagination spins toward its outer limits. By comparison, the first half of this 1997 movie suffers from abstraction. Still, it's a compelling erotic nightmare about a Los Angeles jazz musician (Bill Pullman) who starts receiving anonymous surveillance videos of his Hollywood Hills house just as he's barrelling into a full-bore marital crisis. While on Death Row for murdering his wife, Pullman black-magically transforms into a suburban grease monkey (Balthazar Getty) living out his own saga of amorous betrayal with a blond look-alike of the jazz musician's spouse. (Patricia Arquette gives an all-out performance in the dual role.) The movie grows more hypnotic as

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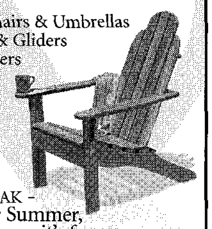

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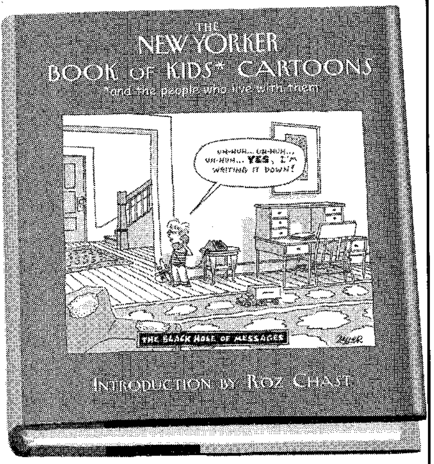
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Getty's story mirrors and then fleshes out Pullman's, with the help of Robert Loggia's scary-comic portrayal of a Mr. Big known as Mr. Eddy and Robert Blake's ultra-creepy presence as the "Mystery Man," who functions as the Spirit of Homicide Past, Present, and Future. The cinematographer Peter Deming lights one of the blackest of all film-noir fade-outs: it traps you in an infinite night.—*M.S.* (Gramercy Theatre; Jan. 11.)

MORVERN CALLAR

Samantha Morton plays the title character in Lynne Ramsay's dark and sensuous portrait of a young Scottish woman who, after her boyfriend's suicide, embarks on an existential journey, as mesmerizing and baffling to her as it is to the audience. As she travels from a dead-end job to a European holiday (accompanied by her best friend, played with party-animal enthusiasm by Kathleen McDermott), the movie's slow narrative tempo begins to entrance. Morton's performance, easily her best, is charismatically impassive. There's a gorgeous strangeness to Ramsay's movie, a distinctive and alluring visual language, and a sound design that keeps the dialogue to a minimum—the film feels like it's floating in ether.—*Bruce Diones* (Cinema Village.)

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

It would be fun to be able to dismiss this as undoubtedly the best movie made up to that time in Pittsburgh, but this 1968 picture also happens to be one of the most gruesomely terrifying movies of all time—and when you leave the theatre you may wish you could forget the whole horrible experience. It's about a night when the dead rise and eat the living; seven people (the most resourceful one is played by Duane Jones) take refuge in a farmhouse, and we watch as the relentlessly marching, hungry corpses come in and tear at them—and we see, in closeup, the devouring of hearts, lungs, entrails. The movie was created by George A. Romero, who photographed and directed on a budget of $114,000. The film's grainy, banal seriousness works for it—gives it a crude realism; even the flatness of the amateurish acting and the unfunny attempts at campy comedy add, somehow, to the horror.—*Pauline Kael* (Moving Image; Jan. 11.)

THE PIANIST

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Lincoln Square and 19th Street East 6.)

RABBIT-PROOF FENCE

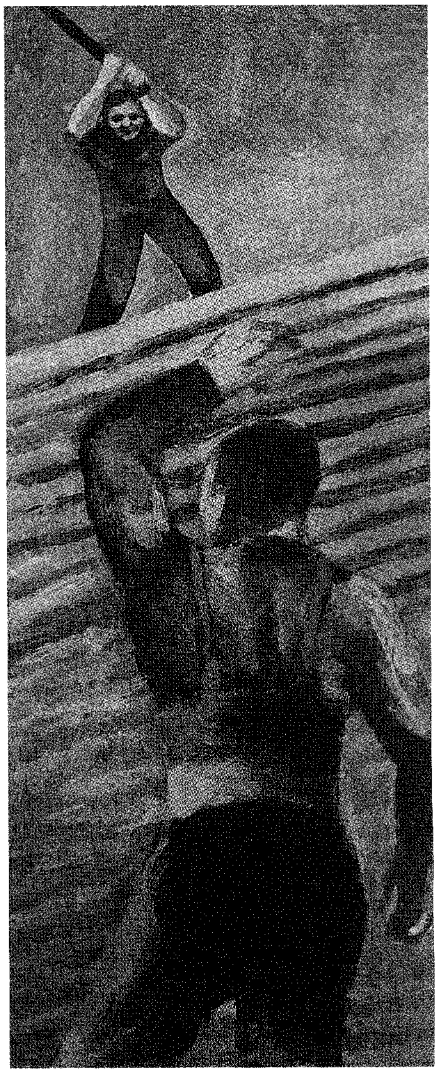
In 1931, three Aboriginal girls fled a state-run native settlement in Western Australia and walked more than twelve hundred miles to their home village. The director Phillip Noyce presents their journey in a straightforward way, giving patient attention to the desolate landscape and the almost wordless resolve of the girls. The movie only hints at the cruelties inflicted on the Aborigines, but the hints are enough. A heartbreaking, elemental film.—*M.A.* (Kew Gardens Cinema, Paris, and Sunshine Cinema.)

RUSSIAN ARK

A guide to the treasures of the Hermitage, a rueful glance down the vistas of Russian history, or a show of technical prowess: take your pick. Alexander Sokurov, the creator of "Mother and Son," proves that his singular method—at once earthy and transcendent—is gaining strength and width. The new film unwinds in one take, lasting ninety-six minutes, and by some miracle we grow happily accustomed to its rhythm, like children held rapt by a bedtime story. The camera glides through galleries as if it were the eye of an invisible visitor; ahead is a black-coated stranger, who accosts passers-by and clucks tenderly, if critically, over the art. Sokurov has made not a documentary, however careful his inspection of painted surfaces, but a collection of small, sorrowful dramas—wait for the imperial children, or the blind woman caressing a marble sculpture. The effect is impenetrable, yet the film is blessed with clarity; maybe, if you spend that much time among Old Masters, they start to rub off on you. In Russian.—*A.L.* (12/16/02) (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TALK TO HER

In Pedro Almodóvar's odd but touching romantic drama, two very different men are drawn together by a common task: taking care of women who have fallen into a coma. Benigno (Javier Cámara), a shy, seemingly asexual young male nurse, looks after Alicia (Leonor Watling), a beautiful ballet dancer. Marco (Darío Grandinetti), a fortyish Argentine writer, becomes the lover of a fierce, long-waisted female bullfighter (Rosario Flores). After she is gored in the ring, she never speaks again. Both love affairs are touched by fantasy. Almodóvar's point appears to be that you can't have love without fable—that every love affair is an improbable narrative wrung from non-being and loneliness. The movie is shot in a new, subdued style for the director: past and present flow together, and everything seems touched with a melancholy magic. Two ballets by the choreographer Pina Bausch are integral to the film's themes. In Spanish.—*D.D.* (11/25/02) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)



Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's "The Son" opens January 10.

ALAIN PILON

25TH HOUR

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

ANTWONE FISHER

Battery Park 16, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.

FRIDA (11/11/02)
Angelika Film Center and East 86th Street Cinemas.
MAX
Angelika Film Center.
NARC
Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.
THE TRIALS OF HENRY KISSINGER (10/7/02)
Film Forum.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kew Gardens Cinema, 81-05 Lefferts Blvd., Queens (718-441-9835).
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Jan. 26: A George A. Romero retrospective. Jan. 11 at 1: "Martin" (1978). ♦ Jan. 11 at 3:30: "Night of the Living Dead" (†), followed by a discussion with Romero. ♦ Jan. 11-12 at 6:30: "The Tales of Hoffmann" (1951, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger), Romero's favorite movie. ♦ Jan. 12 at 2: "Dawn of the Dead" (1978). ♦ Jan. 12 at 4:30: "Day of the Dead" (1985).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Jan. 8-9 at 1, 3:50, 6:50, and 9:25: "Ikiru" (1952, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ Jan. 10-14 at 1:20, 4, 7, and 9:35: "Le Cercle Rouge" (†).
FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Jan. 14 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The Birth of Love" (1993, Philippe Garrel; in French).
GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (777-4900)—Through Jan. 30: "*Positif* Champions: Fifty Years of Cinema," a celebration of the French film monthly. Jan. 9 at 2: "The Sorrow and the Pity" (1971, Marcel Ophuls; in French and German). ♦ Jan. 9 at 7:30 and Jan. 10 at 4:30: "Time Without Pity" (1957, Joseph Losey). ♦ Jan. 10 at 2: "Kanal" (1956, Andrzej Wajda; in Polish). ♦ Jan. 10 at 6:15 and Jan. 12 at 1: "The Clowns" (†). ♦ Jan. 10 at 8 and Jan. 11 at 1: "Nelly and Monsieur Arnaud" (1995, Claude Sautet; in French). ♦ Jan. 11 at 3:30: "The Piano" (1993, Jane Campion). ♦ Jan. 11 at 6: "The Mattei Affair" (1972, Francesco Rosi; in Italian). ♦ Jan. 11 at 8:45: "Lost Highway" (†). ♦ Jan. 12 at 3 and Jan. 13 at 6: "Autumn Tale" (1998, Eric Rohmer; in French). ♦ Jan. 12 at 6: "The Travelling Players" (1974-75, Theo Angelopoulos; in Greek).
SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (358-0573)—Midnight movies. Jan. 10-11: "Being John Malkovich" (1999, Spike Jonze).
THALIA THEATRE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Through April 6: "New Voices Since the Eighties." Jan. 11 at 2 and 7: "Naked Lunch" (1991, David Cronenberg). ♦ Jan. 11 at 4:15 and 9:15: "Crash" (1996, Cronenberg). ♦ Jan. 12 at 2 and 7: "The Life of Jesus" (1997, Bruno Dumont; in French). ♦ Jan. 12 at 3:45 and 8:45: "L'Humanité" (1999, Dumont; in French).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Jan. 9: "People Are Funny: The Films of Leo McCarey." Jan. 8 at 1: "Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys!" (1958). ♦ Jan. 9 at 1:30: Short film program. ♦ Jan. 9 at 4: "Going My Way" (1944). ♦ Jan. 10-11: "Dance on Camera 2003" (see Dance listings). ♦ Starting Jan. 12: The New York Jewish Film Festival.

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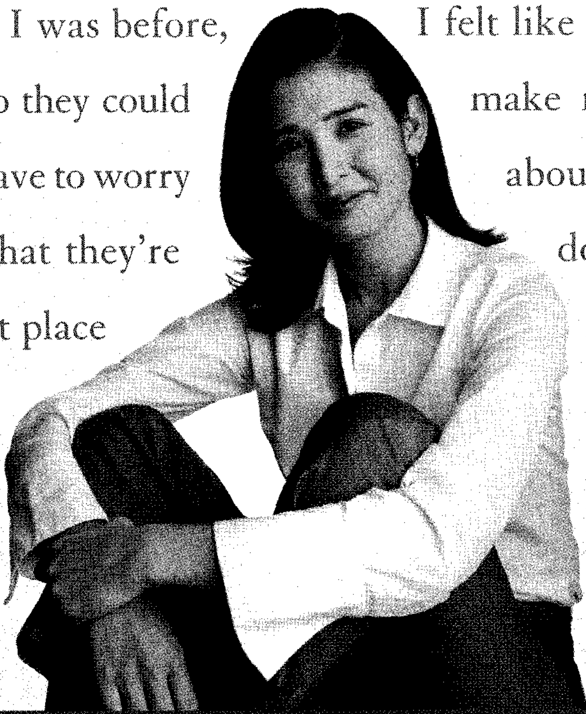

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THE NEW YORKER

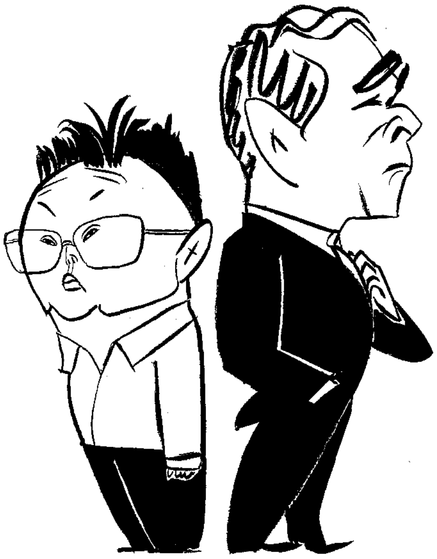
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
AXIS PRAXIS

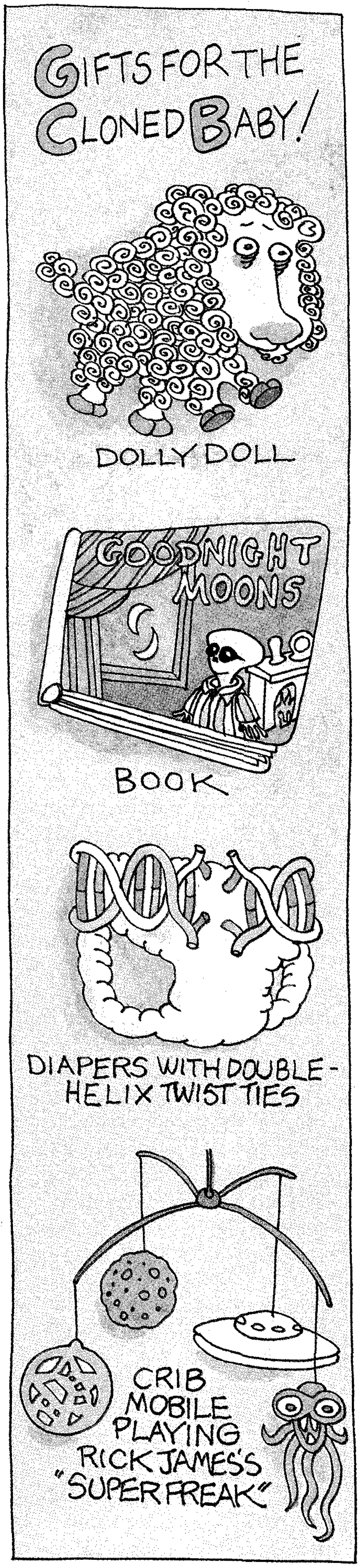
A not completely crazy case can be made that the most influential thinker in the foreign-policy apparatus of the Administration of George W. Bush during its first two years was not one of the familiar members of the gold-shielded Praetorian Guard—not Dick Cheney or Colin Powell, not Condi or Rummy, not Tenet or Wolfowitz—but, rather, a forty-two-year-old Canadian named David Frum. During Year I of Bush II, Frum was a White House speechwriter. Although he left the job only ten months ago, his memoir of those distant days has already been written, edited, and printed, and, as of this week, is in the stores. (The revolving door used to turn with stately languor. Now it comes equipped with a tachometer.) In the book, he writes that when drafting duties for last year's State of the Union Message were being doled out, his assignment was "to provide a justification for a war," specifically a war with Iraq. After much cogitation, he hit upon the idea of likening what the United States has been up against since September 11, 2001, to the villains of the Second World War. The phrase he came up with was "axis of hatred." Higher-ups changed this to "axis of evil," to make it sound more "theological." Although Frum initially intended his "strong language" to apply only to Iraq, Iran was quickly added. (You can't have a single-pointed axis.)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

North Korea was an afterthought. It got stuck in at the last minute, but Frum doesn't quite explain how or why. Perhaps it was meant to echo the global span of the original (Baghdad-Tehran-Pyongyang equals Berlin-Rome-Tokyo). Perhaps it was an application of the rhetorical Rule of Three (our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor; of the people, by the people, for the people; blood, sweat, and tears). Perhaps it was the product of intoxication brought on by an excess of moral clarity. Most likely, it was simply oratorical affirmative action, bused in to lend diversity to what would otherwise have been an all-Muslim list. One thing it was not was the product of careful policy deliberation. It had not been, as they say, staffed out. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported last week, the State Department's East Asia hands learned about it only hours before the speech, and they were not happy. Secretary of State Powell, who almost certainly agreed with them but is ever the good soldier, told them to suck it up: "These are the President's views. It's his speech, so salute and follow."


Kim Jong Il and George W. Bush

As a rhetorical flourish, the axis of evil soared like an eagle. But in retrospect it more closely resembles a turkey, and the inclusion of North Korea, in particular, has begun to look uncannily like a chicken that in recent days has come home to roost. This is of a piece with the whole of the Bush Administration's Korea policy, which, from the beginning, has been a fairly comprehensive botch. The Clinton Administration, at its beginning, hadn't done much better; in 1994, it nearly stumbled into war with North Korea. But, thanks to some timely threats issued by the Defense Secretary at the time, William Perry, and to some diplomatic privateering by Jimmy Carter, the year ended with the signing of the so-called Agreed Framework, under which, in return for various political and economic goodies, Pyongyang put its most dangerous possession—some eight thousand spent nuclear fuel rods, easily convertible into weapons-grade plutonium—in a storage facility watched by United Nations cameras and inspec-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GAHAN WILSON

tors. By the end of the Clinton years, with a new South Korean President, Kim Dae Jung, vigorously pursuing a Willy Brandt-like "sunshine" policy toward the North, the Pyongyang regime was almost frantically signalling not only its eagerness to get more goodies but also its readiness to make more concessions.

Under Bush, matters Korean headed rapidly downhill. When Kim Dae Jung visited Washington, six weeks after Bush took office, Bush humiliated him (and embarrassed Powell) by withdrawing American support for the sunshine initiatives. Before September 11th, when the Administration's foreign-policy obsession was missile defense, it almost seemed to welcome the prospect of a nuclear-armed North Korea. Kim Jong Il's "rogue state" provided a convenient rationale for deploying the only kind of A.B.M. system that might be politically and diplomatically salable and technically even marginally feasible: a very limited one, based in Alaska and not overtly aimed at neutralizing China's deterrent. The Bush national-security team had little use for the Agreed Framework—how could a pact cooked up by Clinton, Carter, and Communists be anything but a mini-Munich?—and allowed it to languish. Nor did the Administration, many of whose members date from the previous Bush regime, seem to understand that this is not your father's Seoul: far from being the dictatorial client state of Cold War times, South Korea is now a vibrant democracy, with notions of its own. Then came the axis-of-evil speech, and then, in October, Pyongyang's astounding admission that it had been violating the Agreed Framework by running a secret uranium-enrichment program, which triggered a cutoff of Framework-mandated fuel-oil supplies. Finally, two weeks ago, North Korea kicked out the U.N. inspectors, capped the U.N. cameras, and announced that it would begin making plutonium from the spent fuel rods.

The Administration takes the view that the essence of the crisis—or "serious situation," as Powell prefers to call it—is simple: North Korea has blatantly violated the Agreed Framework and is now committing nuclear blackmail. All true. Still, given the recent record—including the President's eagerness for "regime change" elsewhere in the A. of E. and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's pointed reference to America's ability to fight two regional wars at once—the Pyongyang regime's paranoia may not be wholly delusional. On a more mundane level, it's also true that the first of the Framework's four points called for the United States to provide, by this year, two light-water reactors (the kind that are impractical for making bombs), capable of nearly doubling North Korea's electricity supply, and that its second point called for moving toward "full normalization of political and economic relations." Neither has been done. This doesn't mean that the two sides are equally culpable in any moral sense. There is a difference between failing to build power plants and threatening annihilation. But it does mean that there is, or ought to be, room for negotiating the peaceful diplomatic settlement that President Bush and Secretary Powell have spent the last week insisting can be reached.

What's a superpower to do? The problem—in the words of Kurt Campbell, who worked on the issue in the Clinton Defense Department and is now a program director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies—is that "Korea is the Land of Lousy Options." America's main goal—and China's, and South Korea's—must be to prevent North Korea from following through on its threat (implied but not yet explicit) to convert the fuel rods, which would allow it to build as many as a half-dozen bombs within months. (For technical reasons, Pyongyang's uranium-enrichment mischief is nothing like so threatening.) War? Not a good idea, even though the offending facility itself could be quite easily "taken out." North Korea has a huge Army and enormous quantities of artillery pieces, many of which are aimed at Seoul. That Army could be defeated, but it could not be prevented from inflicting mass destruction, with or without weapons of that name. Isolation and sanctions, the Bush Administration's initial idea? The first would be redundant, the second both cruel and ineffective; and neither could even be properly tried without the coöperation of Beijing and Seoul.

That leaves diplomacy, the worst choice except for all the others. Unfortunately, by withdrawing the threat of force and ruling out, at least for now, the possibility of direct negotiations, the Administration has dropped both its biggest stick and its tastiest carrot. But it can rely on the help of China, Japan, and South Korea, all of which have a powerful interest both in reducing the nuclear threat from North Korea and in guiding its ultimately doomed regime toward a peaceful, as opposed to a catastrophic, demise. In any event, the Bush Administration is now trying to defuse the situation it did so much to create. After bingeing on moral claret, you might say, the Bush people are sobering up with some strong black Kofi.

It's a bitter draught, and not just because what the Bushies are now doing is mortifyingly similar to what the Clintonites did nine years ago. It's also bitter because, for negotiations to work, North Korea must eventually be offered inducements—must be paid blackmail, if you like. And it's bitter, finally, because the Administration now has to explain why it treats Iraq, which is crawling with U.N. inspectors, so differently from North Korea, which has kicked them out. North Korea is sui generis. Unlike Iraq, it has no economic resources, no ideological allies, no recent record of cross-border aggression, and no territorial ambitions. In a narrow military sense, North Korea is no less dangerous. It has proved its willingness to sell missile and other nuclear-related paraphernalia to unsavory characters around the world. But its vulnerabilities are different. Its government is evil—that's for certain. But one axis does not fit all.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF PROGRESS
MR. NEXT

When Bill Jones retired and moved from Philadelphia to Union City, New Jersey, a few years ago, he had no friends nearby, and although he was not lonely, he observed that his social life consisted chiefly of being stopped on the street by strangers who said, "Excuse me, sir, but did you know you look exactly like Ed Bradley, from '60 Minutes'?"

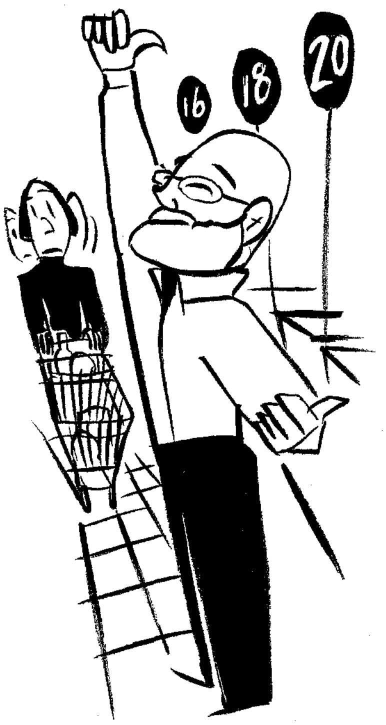
And so on a whim Jones, a broad-shouldered and shaved-headed man in his late sixties, who has worked as a talk-radio host, a television anchorman, and a freelance photographer, decided to respond to a "Now Hiring" sign in the window of Whole Foods Market, on Seventh Avenue in Chelsea. That was how, on a recent busy evening, he came to be standing at the head of a line of admiring grocery shoppers, relishing his role as a local landmark, and crying out "Seven is ready!" in a huge, game-show voice that new visitors to the store study in vain for ironic undercurrents.

At Jones's instruction, the customer at the head of the line pushed her cart toward cashier No. 7. Jones boomed out to the next customer, "Twelve is ready!" Then, "Twenty-two is yours!" And so on. Jones, the market's chief "line director" (none of the other hundred and forty stores in the Whole Foods chain have such a position), later explained, "I do two 'ready's and then one 'is yours.' But sometimes I'll play around with it. Someone will say, 'Listen, I've got my boyfriend with me, can you give me an "is yours"?' And I'll break the sequence, and they're happy, and I think, Life is good that this can bring joy."

The history of American queuing has a simple outline. First there were hordes with sticks, then there were lines, and then, in the early nineteen-eighties, thanks in part to visionary thinking at the Columbus, Ohio, headquarters of Wendy's (and initiatives at American Airlines and Chemical Bank, among others), customers began to be asked to form lines that the trade usually describes as "serpentine": they snaked back on themselves, and the person at the head of the snake stepped up to the next available cashier or teller. This system was plainly fairer: no one who arrived after you would be served before you. It removed most fear and doubt from the queue calculus, leaving only impatience and anger; and in almost every place where it could be adopted it was.

But supermarkets did not join the revolution. Serpentine lines require a big block of dedicated floor space. "In supermarkets, the real estate is just too valuable," said Dick Larson, a professor of electrical engineering at M.I.T., whose friends call him Dr. Queue. "If anyone can solve the supermarket queuing problem—the way banks and airlines have done—that person will become rich and famous."

Two years ago, the designers of Manhattan's Whole Foods Market were presented with an awkward floor plan that did not lend itself to the usual broad battalion of cash registers. The decision was made to arrange the twenty-four registers on two sides of a wide corridor, with a single line of customers feeding them all. But, when this Whole Foods first opened, the line curled back into the depths of the store. "It was past the salad bar," Otto Leuschel, the store's general manager, recalled recently. "People were seeing our line and just running out the door in horror." (In the trade, these people are "balkers," while the ones who join a line but then desert it are "renegers.")



Bill Jones

There was too little space to snake a single line packed with shopping carts; instead, Leuschel imagined three parallel lines moving at the same speed—that is, a single chopped into three. Customers would join the line that was shortest, and the three lines would take turns delivering them to available cashiers.

This was conceived as a self-regulating system. Leuschel laughs now at his naïveté. After a brief period of anarchy, the notion of a line director emerged. The cashiers who tried the task hated it. Then Bill Jones, who had been stocking shelves, took it on with mythmaking confidence and authority. Jones made eye contact with customers, he cracked jokes, and he projected his voice. A queuing system that had been forced onto the store by its architecture became one of its acknowledged virtues, and a sign near the checkouts now boasts of "the fastest-moving lines in New York."

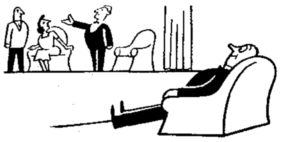
These days, when Jones gets on the bus to go to work (the No. 123 from Union City), there is likely to be someone at the back who shouts, "The 123 is yours!" Children point to him on the street; customers invite him to dinner. "People are mesmerized by the way our lines work," Jones said recently, during a break that would normally include a period of transcendental meditation. "And people let it be known that I'm liked. This is the most gratifying job I've ever had."

Sustained by human contact, Jones is also able to retreat into private thoughts. He plays a game of "register roulette," spotting people way back in line and predicting which cashiers will serve them. He punishes ill-mannered customers by sending them, next time, to the slowest cashier. He attempts to matchmake: if two people have struck up a conversation in parallel lines, he tries to get them to adjacent cashiers.

He said that most shoppers move from the front of the line to their cashier swelled with momentary self-importance, "like they're walking on a red carpet—it's their moment in the sun," but he is also aware that there are some for whom the Whole Foods innovation has been agonizing. "Everyone is watching them, and they wish they could pull in their heads like a turtle," Jones said. "I've had customers stop me on the street. They tell me that when I give them a number they get embarrassed, frustrated, and frightened: a multitude of emotions."

—*Ian Parker*

THE BOARDS
EGGHEADS IN XXX



As far as Stanley Donen is concerned, elegance died in 1959. That was the year he directed Cary Grant in "The Grass Is Greener." "Cary played a titled Englishman, and he was wearing what an earl would wear at night in his country house—a dark-green velvet smoking jacket," Donen said the other day. "Halfway through making the picture, he got terrified. 'I don't want to be in a smoking jacket!' he said. He was afraid that by playing that kind of man he would lose people's interest. A certain sort of polish in films—the way people moved and spoke, the décor—vanished then. And it never came back."

For a time, Donen epitomized Hollywood style. He directed Grant and Audrey Hepburn in "Charade" and Hepburn and Fred Astaire in "Funny Face," and co-directed, with Gene Kelly, the classic musicals "On the Town" and "Singin' in the Rain." He made the world of champagne fountains and pillbox hats look enchanting, which is much harder than it sounds. When Donen accepted an Academy Award for lifetime achievement, in 1998, he charmed the audience by cradling the statuette and singing "Cheek to Cheek," then breaking into a tap dance. He had spent hours working out every beat of this seeming flight of fancy, down to fastening tiny microphones to his shoes and rehearsing the pas de deux with an Oscar belonging to his friend Marshall Brickman.

Today, at the age of seventy-eight, Donen is directing an Off Broadway play about porn. Married and divorced five times, jilted by the studios after his ill-starred 1984 comedy "Blame It On Rio," he has an apartment on the twenty-fifth floor of a high-rise near Central Park, where he is surrounded by framed Avedon photographs of long forgotten models. Donen has unruly black eyebrows and a bushy black beard that give his head—which is mounted on a slim, dancer's body—a Rumpelstiltskinish air. The other day, in his apartment, he was dressed in black from head to toe and had a large silver dog tag hanging from his neck. It read, "Stanley Donen. If found, please return to Elaine May."

This was May's Christmas gift to Donen last year. Her gift to him this year was to write "Adult Entertainment," the play that has restored him to the director's chair. It's about what happens when porn actors on a Public Access cable sex show ask their cameraman, Gerry—a Yale graduate with arty notions—to write an X-rated movie script for them. Gerry soon has them reading "The Jew of Malta" and grappling with such unfamiliar concepts as character arcs and their own mortality; he dreams of transforming them into a cultured company that will make "a Merchant Ivory porn movie."

The play's "The Ho Show" is instantly recognizable to Manhattan night owls as an homage to "The Robin Byrd Show," which airs on cable at midnight and features the ageless, breathless, clueless Byrd asking daffy questions of her half-naked guests, who respond a good while later. Every now and then, someone gets up and strips in front of a red velvet backdrop, eying the camera sincerely.

"Elaine and I watch it a lot," Donen said. "It's fascinating. It sells sex like other people sell lamps or shoes." In his version, though, he didn't want the audience to see too much of the product. "On the Byrd show," he said, lowering his voice, "they show *everything*, with the camera right there. If we did that, it would be embarrassing. Maybe not to the audience, but to me. I never even went to see Kathleen Turner naked"—in the recent Broadway production of "The Graduate"—"because I knew what my reaction would be: 'That's how Kathleen Turner looks naked!' I'd be embarrassed for her, and for all of us staring at her nakedness, and I'd be out the door."

Donen's porn stars are not as bewildered or drugged-seeming as their real-life counterparts. But though the play traces the awakening of the characters' cultural aspirations, it concludes on a melancholy note. No matter how they try, they will never achieve polish, let alone artistic immortality.

"That's what got me most of all," Donen said, placing his hand over his heart. "When Gerry acknowledges, 'We won't stop time. We won't be the reward to civilization.'" He was clearly moved. "Here it is," he was finally able to say. "As an artist, I aspire to be as remarkable as Leonardo da Vinci. To be fantastic, astonishing, one of a kind. I will never get there. He's the one who stopped time. I just did 'Singin' in the Rain.' It's pretty good, yes. It's better than most, I know. But it still leaves you reaching up."

—*Tad Friend*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE TASTEMAKERS

For much of the twentieth century, coffee was America's drink. A 1939 survey found that ninety-eight per cent of the country's households drank coffee. After the Second World War, consumption rose steadily until the early sixties, when the average American was downing almost fifty gallons a year. Then coffee went cold. Younger consumers came to regard it, like Scotch, as a palliative for parents and squares. The arid blends peddled by Maxwell House and Folgers lost ground to Coke and Pepsi. Coffee consumption plummeted.

Along came Starbucks. Starbucks proved that you could sell "gourmet" coffee to the masses, and in the process turned itself into a seemingly recession-proof enterprise. A few weeks ago, the company announced that, despite the weak economy, its profits were up nineteen per cent for the year. (It might be that rising unemployment suits Starbucks fine, delivering an exodus of time killers and résumé polishers to its comfy chairs.) The real measure of Starbucks' success, however, is that it has helped turn America into a nation of java junkies again. During the nineties, the number of coffee drinkers rose by almost forty million. More than seven thousand new coffeehouses have opened since 1996.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways to build a successful business. You can give people what they want but give it to them more efficiently, as Wal-Mart and Dell have done. Or you can persuade them to want something that they didn't previously want, as Starbucks has done. One might call this the tastemaker approach. Instead of competing for a share of an existing market, Starbucks invented its own, heeding the advice of the economist Joseph Schumpeter, who wrote, in 1939, "It was not enough to produce satisfactory soap, it was also necessary to induce people to wash."

This is harder than it sounds; it's one thing to foist a fad on people, and another to have a deep and enduring impact on their everyday customs and habits. In the late eighteen-eighties, when George Eastman invented the Kodak—the first point-and-shoot camera—photography was the private domain of enthusiasts and professionals. Though the Kodak was relatively cheap and easy to use, most Americans didn't see the need for a camera; they had no sense that there was any value in visually documenting their lives. So, instead of simply marketing a camera, Eastman sold photography. His advertisements told people what to take pictures of: vacations, holidays, "the Christmas house party." Kodak introduced the concept of the photo album, and made explicit the connection between photographs and memories. Before long, it was more or less considered a patriotic duty to commemorate the notable—and not so notable—moments in your life on a roll of Kodak film.

Around the same time, Will Kellogg introduced Corn Flakes and popularized the idea of the healthy, light breakfast, and Colgate insisted that brushing your teeth every day—with Colgate toothpaste, naturally—was as necessary as sleep. Gillette persuaded men not only that shaving every morning was the proper thing to do but that they didn't need to go to a barber to get it done right. (Gillette ran ads instructing men in techniques like "the angle stroke.") Later, McDonald's convinced suburban mothers that it was O.K. not to put a home-cooked meal on the table every night. Similarly, Starbucks changed not just what people drank but how they drank it. Instead of gulping down gas-station swill on the fly, people learned to desire the experience of leisurely sipping a grande latte, while eavesdropping on job interviews, at one of Starbucks' six thousand convenient locations worldwide.

All these companies relied on clever marketing (though in different ways; Starbucks, for example, has spent very little on advertising—its stores and cups serve as ads). But marketing on its own isn't enough. Successful tastemakers tend to have history's wind at their backs. Kodak and Gillette benefitted from a broader democratization and privatization of technology. McDonald's capitalized on the rise of suburbia, the automobile, and the working mother. And Starbucks took advantage of several trends, including the dramatic improvement in the range and quality of foods available to the average American, the rise of telecommuting and freelancing, and a move toward what the Harvard historian Nancy Koehn calls "affordable luxuries," which allowed Americans to cultivate the aura of affluence at a relatively low price. Just as important, these companies came of age during economic booms. "It's usually during moments of great prosperity that entrepreneurs can change the habits of millions of consumers and make a new product into something that seems essential," Koehn says.

How sinister you find this process depends on whether you consider consumers to be gullible dupes or discerning savants. Either way, tastemakers can be powerful engines of economic growth, because entire industries spring up around them (think of fast food after McDonald's or the breakfast business after Kellogg's). Business is often a zero-sum game—Wal-Mart thrives by crushing less efficient competitors—but when tastemakers succeed they create competitors. The economist William Baumol estimates that innovators and their investors keep less than twenty per cent of the economic benefits that their innovations create. The rest spills over. This is why there are thousands more independent coffeehouses today than when Starbucks started, and why Dunkin' Donuts, Maxwell House, and Folgers now sell premium coffee. It is also why pretty much everyone you know has clean teeth and shoeboxes full of snapshots.

—*James Surowiecki*

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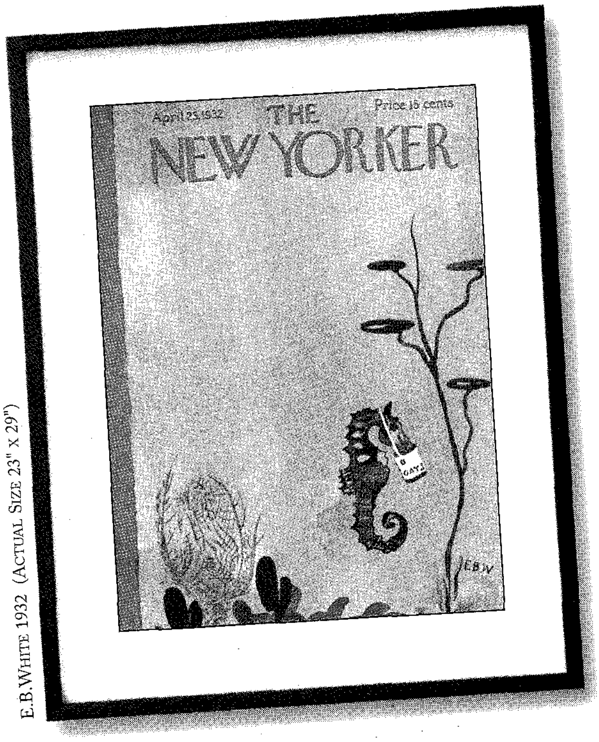
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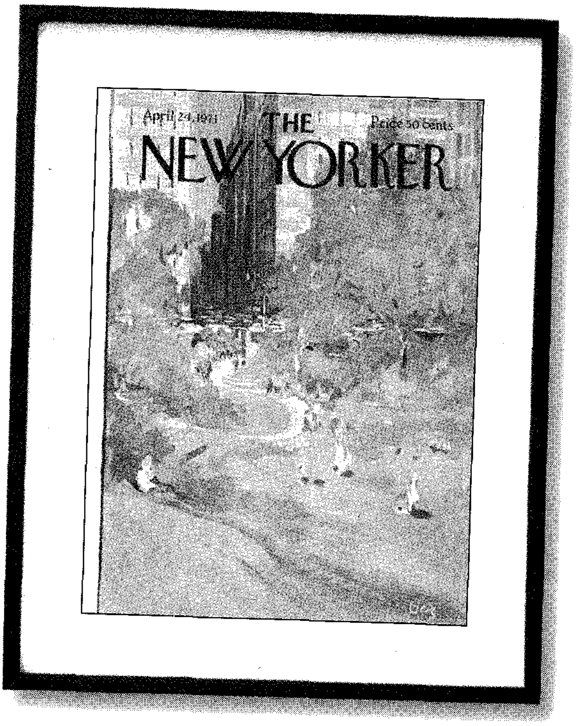
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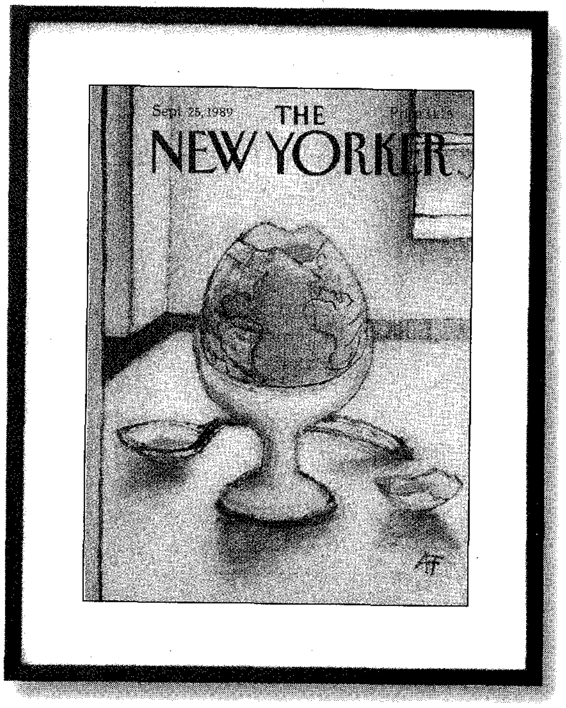
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AROUND CITY HALL

SIX BILLION SHORT

How will the Mayor make ends meet?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

The choices facing the city today have been described as "pain or more pain."

BARRY BLITT

The Citizens Budget Commission, a watchdog group funded by some of the city's major businesspeople, describes its goal as "influencing constructive change" in civic life. To this end, it holds periodic seminars and issues papers with titles like "A Proposal to Increase the Productivity of Non-Managerial Civilian Municipal Workers." All mayors find the C.B.C.'s high-minded efforts an irritant—some more than others. Rudolph Giuliani refused even to deal with the group, and one year went so far as to try to organize a boycott of its annual fund-raising dinner.

Last month, Mayor Michael Bloomberg agreed to be the keynote speaker at a weekend conference that the C.B.C. was holding. He began, characteristically, with a joke: "If you don't mind, I'd like to take a few minutes off and call Rudy and ask him whether this was an intelligent thing to do." He went on to acknowledge some of those present, including the New York public advocate, Betsy Gotbaum, whom, he said, he often met on Saturday mornings anyway, at the hair salon, and also the City Council speaker, Gifford Miller, who, he speculated, got his hair done someplace different—"cheaper, probably." Then he said, "All kidding aside, we are in the middle of some very tough times."

Bloomberg put the size of the city's budget gap for the next fiscal year at $6.4 billion. Depending on how you calculate, this shortfall represents a sixth of the city's budget or a quarter of it. The lower figure is the gap expressed as a proportion of all city revenues, the higher as a proportion of only those revenues raised from city taxpayers. Measured another way, the gap corresponds roughly to the total annual expenditures of New York's Police, Fire, Sanitation, and Corrections Departments combined, or, alternatively, more than the entire 2002 budget for the city of Houston and its surrounding county.

"The law requires us to close the gap," the Mayor declared. "Our expenses and revenues have to be the same, and, regardless of the pain, we will make them the same." He praised the City Council for having recently approved the largest property-tax rate hike in New York history—eighteen and a half per cent—saying that members of the Council had acted "dramatically and courageously," and he alluded to a series of spending cuts that his administration has in the works. Nevertheless, he insisted, to the surprise of many in the audience, that the city should not be called on to reduce expenditures any further.

"The fact of the matter is we have cut as much as I believe we can," Bloomberg said. "More cuts risk adversely affecting New York City's quality of life and reducing the ability to grow our way out of this problem."

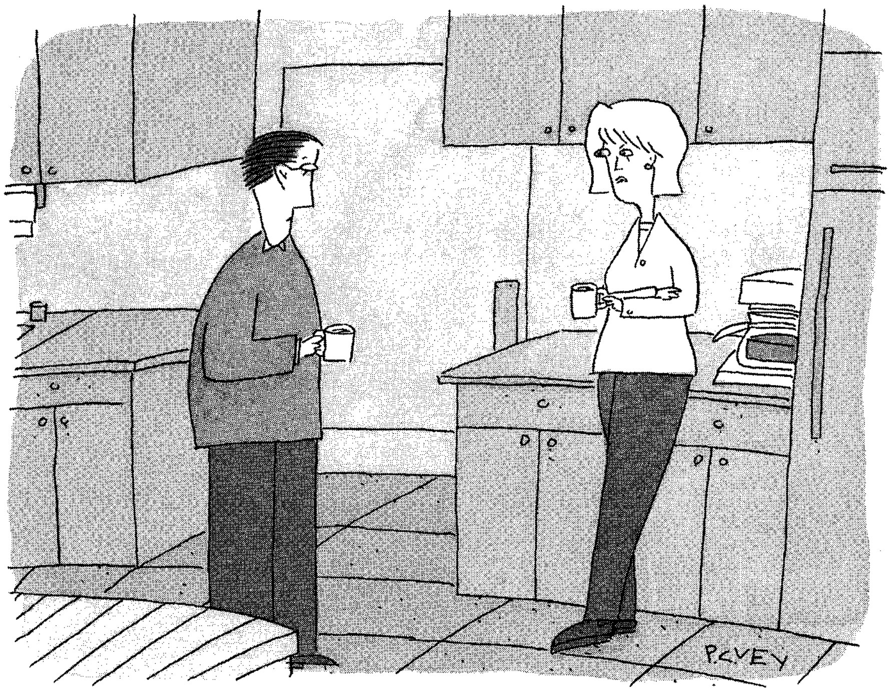
How the city does get out of its problem—or fails to—will be settled sometime in the months ahead. In a few weeks, the Mayor will present his financial plan for the upcoming fiscal year, and Governor George Pataki will present his proposed state budget, in Albany. (In his inaugural address last week, Pataki described the fiscal problems facing the state as "historic, grave, and daunting.") At issue in an immediate sense is how to fill the city's budget gap—whether through additional spending cuts, higher taxes, state aid, or creative accounting. At stake in a larger sense are New York's prospects five, ten, perhaps even twenty-five years from now. As Bloomberg observed, "Someone once said that the holidays are when kids get what they want and adults pay for it. A budget shortfall is when adults get what they want and their kids pay for it." Then he caught himself. "We're not going to do that."

The last time New York experienced a shortfall of this magnitude was during the fiscal crisis of the seventies—a parallel that is not, of course, terribly reassuring. That shortfall, which was the result of genuine idealism, calculated generosity, and extremely bad bookkeeping, several times brought the city to the edge of bankruptcy. The problems began in the late nineteen-sixties, when Mayor John Lindsay presided over an ambitious expansion of the city's anti-poverty programs at the same time that he was negotiating a series of beneficent contracts with its municipal unions. (One pension "sweetener," for the teachers' union, was later described as "the largest unconditional commitment of city funds in the history of American city government.") During Lindsay's first term, spending grew by an average of more than fifteen per cent a year, and in his second term by more than ten per cent a year. The city imposed an income tax, raised the property tax, and doubled the subway fare, but revenues still could not keep pace. The Lindsay administration dealt with this inconvenience by issuing debt. As the notes came due, the city covered them by issuing more debt, until a recession hit and the whole house-of-cards arrangement finally collapsed.

When it did, Mayor Abe Beame was standing under it. He was a year into his term, and his first reaction was to temporize, either because he genuinely believed that the problem was being overstated or because he couldn't think of anything else to do. At one point, he invested fifty thousand dollars of his own money in New York notes, declaring, "The economic strengths of this city are unparalleled." When, in May of 1975, the banks refused to underwrite any more borrowing, Beame continued to insist that New York's fiscal condition was sound. He denounced the financial houses, the editorial boards, the State Legislature, and the federal government, all of whom, he charged, were "more concerned with numbers than with people."

Beame and the city got through that summer on a series of increasingly arcane financing schemes, but by early fall just about every source of money that could be tapped had been. At last, in mid-October, the Mayor presented an austerity plan aimed at bringing the budget back into balance in three years. In a cover letter to Governor Hugh Carey, Beame complained that he was being forced, in effect, to destroy New York in order to save it. "We can take no pride in the plan, because it places a higher priority on the grim realities confronting the city, rather than on the needs of our citizens," he wrote. The bitter tone of the letter, combined with the cuts that the Mayor was proposing, seemed to suggest that, in his opinion, at least, things couldn't get any worse. He was wrong. Just two days later, several hundred million dollars' worth of short-term notes came due, and the city didn't have enough cash to redeem them. Angry note-holders crowded the Municipal Building, and bond trading on Wall Street ground to a halt. Aides to the Mayor drafted a statement for him to read at the appropriate moment: "I have been advised by the comptroller that the city of New York has insufficient cash on hand to meet debt obligations due today." Default was averted—by hours—only when the teachers' pension fund agreed to loan the city a hundred and fifty million dollars.

The consequences of the fiscal crisis were nearly as dire as Beame had predicted. The crisis cost thirty-five thousand municipal workers their jobs, brought an end to free tuition at City University, forced the suspension of countless public construction projects, and generally ushered in one of the bleaker periods in the city's history. A quarter of a century and two stock-market booms later, New York is, in a very real sense, still paying for it. Every year, the first five hundred million dollars the city collects from its sales tax goes toward retiring bonds issued to resolve the crisis, and this will continue until 2008, when those bonds finally mature.



"You used to love the way I annoyed the hell out of you."

Bloomberg is not the type to find fault, either with himself or with others. When he discusses the city's fiscal problems, as he is obliged to do just about all the time these days, he pointedly tries to avoid assigning blame. "No one's at fault, or maybe, in a different sense, we all are," he said recently. "Let's today not look to the past and say what might have been if we knew what was going to happen."

As a matter of record, no great clairvoyance was required, and many groups, including the C.B.C., forecast what was going to happen quite accurately. In the late nineties, New York's economy boomed, and then the boom ended. During the first half of the cycle, cash flooded into the city treasury; every time Goldman Sachs handed out a round of bonuses, or a Silicon Alley start-up went public, New York, thanks to its income tax, took a percentage. Thus, even as the city was cutting its hotel tax, its commercial-rent tax, and its sales tax on clothing, total tax revenues were steadily growing.

Giuliani, who had always cast himself as a fiscal conservative, had to decide what to do with this embarrassment of riches. On reflection, he chose to spend it. He increased the education budget by half, and the police budget by nearly three-quarters. The number of city employees, which had declined significantly during the early nineties, swelled back up to a near-record figure of two hundred and fifty thousand. Meanwhile, the bill for debt service in New York rose by two-thirds, and, owing largely to actions in Albany, the city's pension costs almost doubled. The increased spending certainly made New York a nicer place to live, but it was the civic equivalent of counting on the Pick-6 to meet your mortgage payments. Even before Giuliani left office, the economy was clearly turning. Nevertheless, in his final budget, which the City Council approved just three months before the World Trade Center attack, he increased expenditures by nearly two and a half billion dollars. By the end of that fiscal year, in June, 2002, tax collections had dropped by more than a billion dollars.

Immediately on taking office, last January, Bloomberg had to deal with this shortfall and, more fundamentally, with a government that had once again grown beyond its means. He argued that because of September 11th, which cost the city some hundred and twenty thousand jobs, it was not the moment to raise taxes or drastically cut spending, and he announced plans to balance the budget by borrowing $1.5 billion. This subsequently became $2 billion. The borrowing bought time, but at the cost of a hundred and eighty million dollars a year in added debt-service charges.

Since then, the city's fiscal situation has only deteriorated. Tax revenues have been lower than anticipated, and savings that Bloomberg had been counting on, including two hundred and fifty million dollars in unspecified "productivity increases," never materialized. The property-tax increase and the cuts that the Mayor pushed through in November will probably get the city through the current fiscal year, which ends in June. But even according to Bloomberg's own figures they barely go halfway toward filling the $6.4-billion gap projected for the year after.

When the Mayor makes his budget presentation, he will, presumably, give a

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and the white threads of the grasses, and the cushion of moss;
a few drops, round as pearls, will enter the mole's tunnel;

and soon so many small stones, buried for a thousand years,
will feel themselves being touched.

—*Mary Oliver*

detailed account of how he plans to close the rest of the gap. One proposal that he has floated involves lowering the city's top income-tax rate while extending the tax to a million or so commuters. (As the tabloids pointed out with delight, those who would fare best under this plan are the city's wealthiest residents, Bloomberg included, who would save tens of thousands of dollars a year.) The Mayor's justification for the plan is that commuters use city services, too. "Last time I checked, when the firefighters went into the World Trade Center they didn't ask anybody where the hell they lived," he has said. Although there may be an argument here, in a practical sense it's almost beside the point, since the only group that has the power to extend the tax is the New York State Legislature.

In fact, until a few years ago, when the legislature chose to meddle in the matter, New York had a commuter tax, which brought in three hundred and fifty million dollars a year. The tax was repealed in the spring of 1999, in a nakedly partisan effort to influence a special election in Rockland County. ("God forgive you all," Tony Seminerio, a Queens assemblyman who voted against the repeal, told his colleagues. "You don't deserve to be elected officials.") Bloomberg is hoping not just to revive the recently killed tax but to quintuple it. As the New York State Financial Control Board, a relic of the last fiscal crisis, delicately put it in December, his plan "relies on actions outside of the city's control and seems unlikely to elicit an entirely favorable response from its intended partners."

Bloomberg is, in general, an optimist. As a candidate, he used to warn against driving people out of New York. "Raising taxes is not an option!" he declared. Now that he has done just that, he cheerfully asserts that there's nothing to worry about: "I don't believe that people will leave this city because of higher taxes. I do believe they would leave this city very quickly because of lower services." Bloomberg maintains that another boom is just around the corner, and that the important thing is not to overreact to temporary setbacks. "I think New Yorkers expect me to run city government in much the same ways I ran my company," he observed a few weeks ago. "Fair enough. I didn't build the most successful media company in the world with layoffs." A little solicitude, he seems to believe, will be enough to win over the State Legislature. Not long ago, he flew the Assembly speaker, Sheldon Silver, and the Senate majority leader, Joseph Bruno, down to his house in Bermuda for a few rounds of golf.

Optimism is a reassuring quality in a mayor, and Bloomberg's successes so far—gaining mayoral control of the school system, pushing through tough new smoking restrictions—probably would not have been possible without it. But, unchecked, hopefulness can start to sound uncomfortably like evasion. "Now it's time, since we've done what we can, for others to step up to the plate," he told the C.B.C.

In 1975, a different mayor could probably have averted the fiscal crisis, or at least softened its worst effects. Abe Beame, a product of Brooklyn clubhouse politics, was too timid and, eventually, found himself sidelined. A few months into the crisis, the State Legislature created a new agency, the Municipal Assistance Corporation, or MAC, to, in effect, run the city's finances. Its chairman was the investment banker Felix Rohatyn, who, along with Governor Carey, is generally credited with saving New York from insolvency.

Not long ago, I went to visit Rohatyn at his apartment on Fifth Avenue. Rohatyn is now seventy-four, with white hair and salt-and-pepper eyebrows, and heads a financial-consulting firm. "There are similarities in the surrounding ethos, if you will, of today and the seventies," he told me in his distinctive low murmur. "In the seventies, there was a war in the Middle East, we had the stock-exchange collapse, we had Nixon going into Cambodia, and we had a recession economy." Taking into account the national economy, which is weak, and the state's fiscal condition, which is precarious—during the boom, Governor Pataki, too, spent everything that came in, and then some—Rohatyn said it was hard to judge whether New York is any better off than it was in the mid-seventies: "We had a situation which is not present today, which is bankruptcy, although there are other issues that are maybe worse than what we had." He noted that, perversely, one disadvantage now is the absence of inflationary pressure: "I have never said publicly that we owed our balanced budget to the Arab oil embargo, but it certainly helped. It's very difficult to do this if you don't have some inflation that drives your revenues."

As chairman of MAC, Rohatyn oversaw the restructuring of the city's debt. MAC paid off the city's short-term notes—the source of its continual cash-flow problems—by issuing thirty-year bonds. Part of the complicated arrangement that persuaded the banks to underwrite these bonds was a thorough overhaul of the city's books. New accounting standards were imposed that make it all but impossible for the city to hide its deficits or issue debt to pay for routine expenses. Now, if it ends the fiscal year with even a relatively modest shortfall, the Financial Control Board automatically takes over its finances.

During the twenty-five years that these rules have been in effect, they have probably prevented a good deal of chicanery; still, as the city's current difficulties demonstrate, they have their limits. "It was obvious that the market was going to crash at some point," Rohatyn told me. But as long as money was pouring in there was nothing in the rules to prevent the city from spending it. "Maybe the accountants could have said, 'You cannot treat this windfall as recurring revenues,' " Rohatyn said. "Or the rating agencies could have said, 'You can't borrow against these revenues as if they were permanent.' Or the Control Board. But that's introducing outsiders into the system. You can do that when there's a crisis. When I served on the Control Board and was chairman of MAC, we did some of these things, but immediately people would say, 'Well, who elected Felix?' And they were right."

Rohatyn described the choices facing the city today as "pain or more pain," and he urged Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki to appeal to Washington for some form of revenue-sharing aid to get through this difficult time. "The Mayor and the Governor have to try to create a national coalition and go to the federal government for temporary assistance to state and local governments. If we have to close these deficits at the local level, it's all taxes and cuts, which is very deflationary and recessionary. Frankly, other than that, I don't see anything that is likely to give us any significant relief."

How well or how badly the city fares in the coming year will depend on a lot of things, including the amount of aid the federal government does provide, the direction the stock market takes, and the outcome of events in Iraq. Ultimately, though, it will be up to the Mayor and the City Council to balance the budget—"regardless of the pain," as Bloomberg put it—because under the current rules the only alternative is to hand that task over to the Financial Control Board. In the seventies, the city's political culture failed, and it wasn't until after the bankruptcy papers had been drawn up that the necessary austerities were accepted. Perhaps this time around the city will act in time to avoid a full-blown crisis. The worry always is that it can't act without one. ♦

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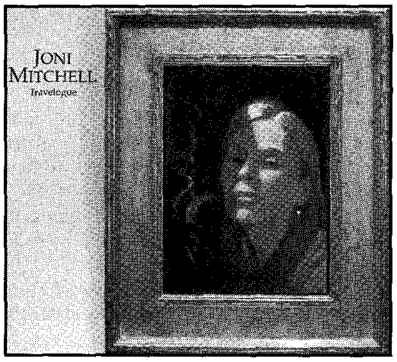

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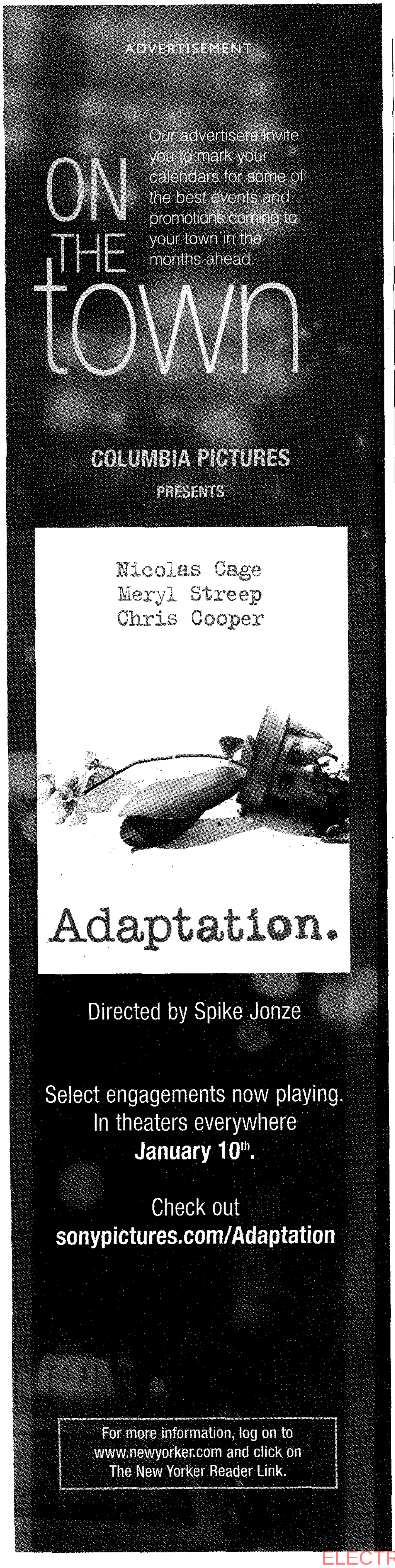

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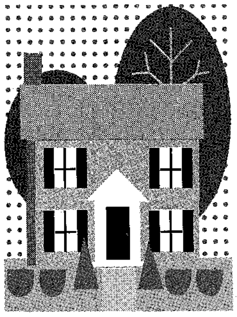
IF YOU'RE THINKING OF LIVING IN . . .

BY ROBERT SULLIVAN

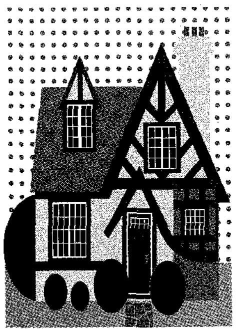
Of the fifteen neighborhoods that make up Greenwich's fifty square miles, one, running north-south along the eastern side of town, has a name that is said to be unique: Cos Cob. Nobody knows what it means. —*"If You're Thinking of Living in: Cos Cob," in the Sunday Times.*

Dan Daniels, a thirty-eight-year-old investment banker and father of two who lives in a six-bedroom renovated Colonial in the Heights neighborhood of Hob Nob, doesn't know exactly how he chose the charming commuter village in which he lives. "I'd been at my bachelor party, and I was really drunk," said Daniels, who moved there six years ago, around the time that he and his wife were thinking about starting a family, "and I think I was dumped out of the limo, or maybe it was a taxi, I don't remember for certain, and when I woke up here, in Founders' Park, I thought, Hob Nob? What the hell does that mean?"

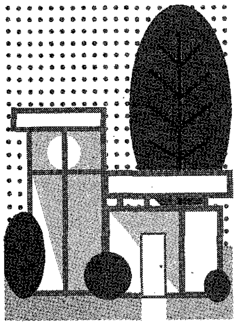
Today, Daniels commutes daily by train to midtown Manhattan from this unique family-oriented place—it is only an hour and a half to Grand Central—while his wife, Daniella, the president of a small public-relations firm in SoHo, takes a mere fifteen minutes to commute by car service. "There's a special sense of community here in Hob Nob," Daniella said. "I've gotten so that I know my driver's name, and that's the kind of place this is. It's a place where people see people over and over again, and sometimes know their names." Initially, the couple was reluctant to leave their apartment on the Upper West Side, but after six years in Hob Nob they aren't certain what Upper West Side means.



Nice ceilings, nice floors, nice place to end up on Nice Street.



2-car garage, 2-hour commute, 2-die-4 Tudor, $2 million.



Way hot, completely cool, over-the-top, and totally too expensive.

Incorporated in 1636 on the site of a tavern owned by a Dutch settler named Pietr Hobanob, Hob Nob was first known as Have-a-Nob, though scholars are confounded about the origin of the modern name. The town sits at the base of a mountain and on the shore of a river, and is easily reachable by the Cross Bronx Expressway, the Cross County Parkway, the Cross Westchester, the Wilbur Cross, or the Cross Cross, or by crossing back again and again. Hob Nob was wiped out once by the Great Fire of 1712, and again during an Allied bombing raid that has been all but forgotten. "Old man Woolwrinkle talks about the time Franklin Roosevelt came to town and shook hands on the village green," Pete Hobanob, the director of the local historical society, said. "Of course, Woolwrinkle grew up in Cheyenne, Wyoming, but he lives here now." In general, it is thought that the town has a real history.

In the past ten years, families have begun to flock to Hob Nob from the city, and, according to Rob Hobanob, of Hobanob & Hobanob Real

RICHARD MCGUIRE

Estate, the price of housing seems to reflect the increase in demand. "Last week, we sold a two-bedroom house that burned down three years ago for a million dollars," he said. In other neighborhoods, a four-bedroom, two-bathroom house recently sold for an unknown amount, while the median price of a one-bedroom apartment is not well understood. "Every day, I look at the houses selling and I ask myself, 'What does all this mean?' " Hobanob admitted.

It is not at all clear where residents of Hob Nob do their shopping, and people sometimes drive around in circles just trying to find a place to buy gas. There is a small downtown area on Main Street where there are thought to be several stores. "I reckon we have everything we need right here," said Farmer Bob, a local farmer, whose vegetable stand closed recently when he couldn't find it. "And, besides, when I can't get something I really want, Los Angeles is only five hours away by plane." Recreational facilities abound in the area, and include a golf course, a pool, a stationary bicycle, a moving sidewalk, a rotating restaurant, a dancing bear, a lost resort, a two-way mirror, and a pain in the ass.

The schools in Hob Nob are considered excellent, and they are said to be in the fields beyond the hill at the end of town, though none of the parents have ever seen them, since they do not know exactly what is meant by "the end of town." The middle school is in an undisclosed location. After eighth grade, children continue on to Hob Nob High, whatever that means.

Dan and Daniella Daniels plan to retire in Hob Nob. They love their home, which they have renovated twice in the past six years—first by adding three bedrooms on the second floor, and then, last fall, by tearing down the house itself and replacing it with an apartment on the Upper West Side. "This is a wonderful place to bring up kids," said Daniella, whose children come home from boarding school in Maine during the holidays each year. "I wouldn't leave here if you paid me, which is why we don't plan on going anywhere unless we get a really good price for our house." ♦

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U.S. JOURNAL

TEEN BEAT

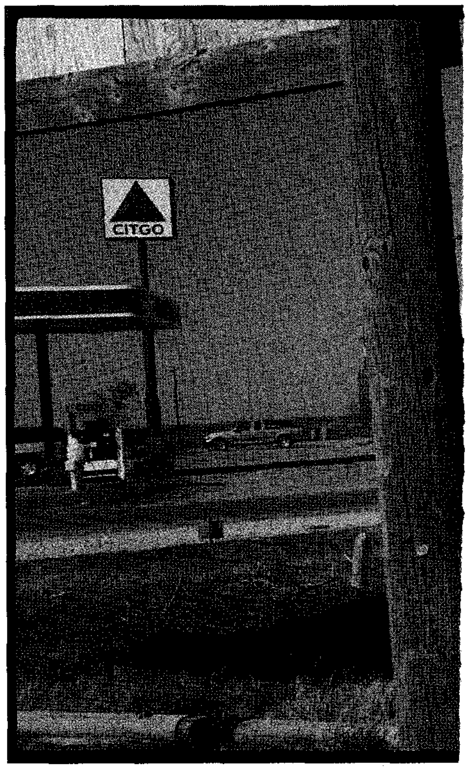
What happens when a high-school weekly is the only newspaper in town.

BY MARK SINGER

ITASCA, TEXAS

News travels quickly in Itasca, Texas, where, coincidentally, it doesn't have far to go. Itasca has a central Texas location—just off Interstate 35, equally convenient to Fort Worth and Waco—but its sixteen hundred citizens are accustomed to the rest of the world's not paying much attention, so they pay particular attention to each other. Visitors wandering off the interstate encounter a billboard that says, "Welcome to Itasca, 'The Big Little Town,' " a friendly display of civic pride and becoming modesty. The slogan also appears beneath the front-page logo of the local weekly, the *Paw Print Press*. When I showed up one morning last month, among the first people to greet me were Allison Bailey and Cymbre Weatherly, the newspaper's co-editors. I had no trouble finding their office. I just kept driving—past the billboard, past black-soil wheat and milo fields—until I spotted Itasca High School, the most conspicuous object on the horizon which wasn't a water tower.

Thirteen students at Itasca High ("Home of the Mighty Wampus Cats") make up the staff of the *Paw Print Press*. Five of them are seniors, but only Allison and Cymbre have been at it since their sophomore year, so Barbara Petrash, the paper's adviser, installed them atop the masthead. Mrs. Petrash teaches journalism (also world history), which makes her classroom the paper's newsroom. More to the point, during the past five years the *Paw Print Press* has been Itasca's only newspaper, and Mrs. Petrash's role in the school and the community has expanded in a way that renders it difficult to define her job concisely. The journalism class meets every weekday from 11 A.M. to noon. Newsworthy events, however, have a tendency to occur at any hour. I happened to arrive, for instance, the morning of the annual holiday brunch hosted by the Itasca Chamber of Commerce and the Itasca Garden Club, which was scheduled to begin at nine o'clock. Mrs. Petrash wanted to be certain that Allison and Cymbre and another reporter, Timishia Mayberry, got there before the fun wound down, so she persuaded their physics teacher to excuse them from class, a sacrifice that the girls were willing to make.



After the last newspaper closed, the town los

"Mainly, I want captions," said Mrs. Petrash, a large woman in her mid-fifties with short light-brown hair, pink cheeks, and a bemused air. "Make sure you find out how this year's brunch compares to previous years'. Get some food. Taste all the goodies. And get lots of pictures, so we have some options."

The girls nodded, Mrs. Petrash handed Cymbre a digital camera, and we headed for the parking lot. Before we took off in Allison's burgundy Nissan Ultima, she apologized for the mess in the back seat. She stashed her marching-band uniform, a blanket, and a Bible in the trunk. It took less than three minutes to reach downtown Itasca—a low-rise gathering of a couple of dozen retail establishments radiating from an intersection punctuated by the only traffic light within several miles. Along the way, as Allison adroitly dodged potholes, I saw mostly wood-frame housing, much of which looked ready for a paint job, and several vacant lots in need of tidying up. We parked in front of a two-story office building owned by Hilco, a rural electrical coöperative and the town's largest private employer. The brunch was being held in a ground-floor meeting room.

About forty people—Hilco employees, city employees, busy retirees, and cowboy-hatted elderly fellows who any other morning would have been down at Jimmy's Corner Store, discussing local and global affairs while drinking their seventh cup of coffee—were seated at long tables, sampling a potluck buffet. It turned out that the person most in command of the facts was Betty Sumner, a retired schoolteacher and the president of the Chamber of Commerce. She greeted Allison with a hug, and Allison, who has long straight black hair and is strikingly pretty, got right to work.

"I need to do some talking to you," she said. "So you-all been going on for an hour?"

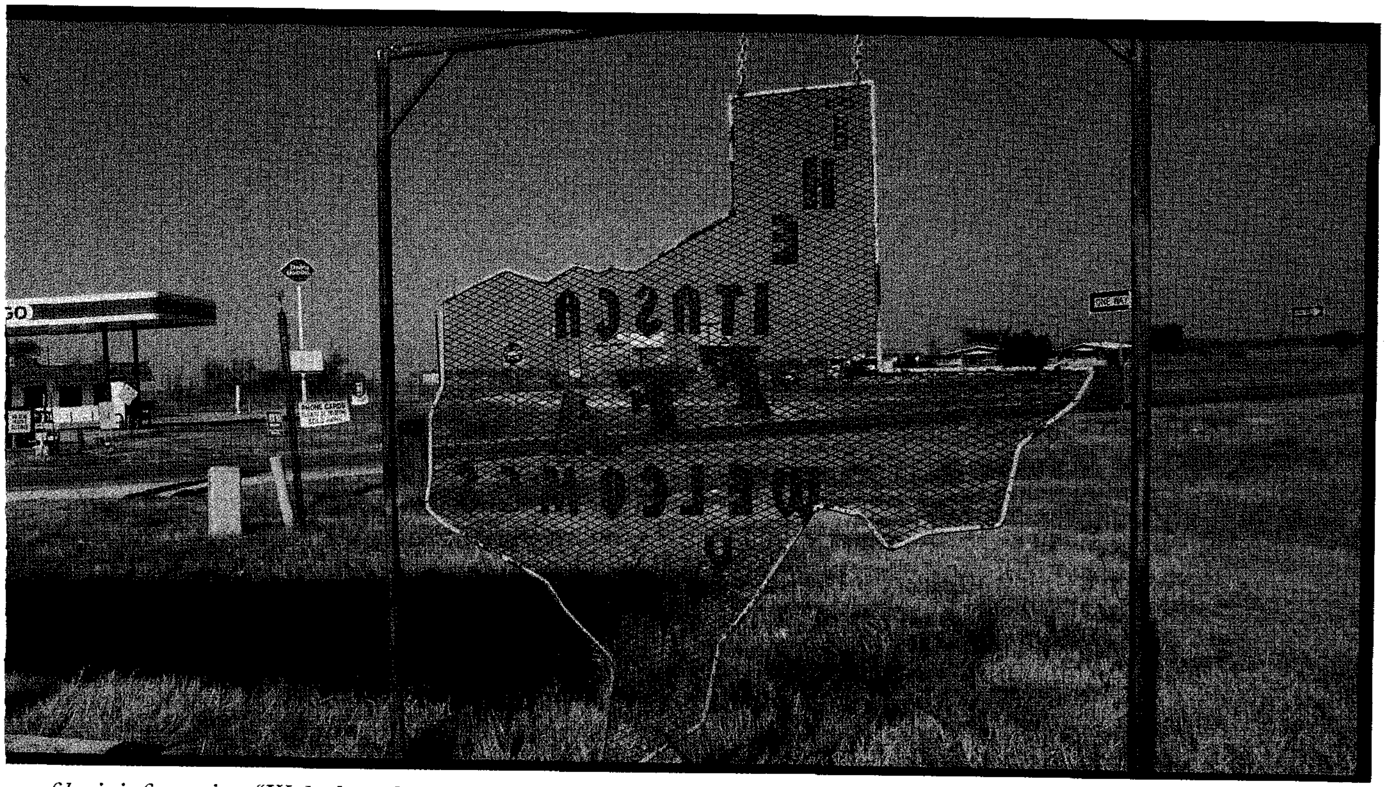
"Well, yes," Sumner said. "We're thinking maybe we want to change the time, because we've been starting at nine, and there's talk that maybe we should do this later."

They discussed the historical evolution of the brunch: the Chamber inaugurated it in 1985 and it became a joint venture a few years later; the Garden Club members provide the food, the Chamber members the beverages; a lot of people belong to both groups, so there's always plenty to go around. When I sensed that Allison was running out of questions ("So you say the Chamber arranges for the poinsettia centerpieces—now, wouldn't that be a Garden Club thing to do?"), I decided to check out the buffet: raw vegetables, mixed nuts, deep-fried olives, little sausages, pimiento cheese spread on crustless whole wheat, a block of cream cheese topped with salsa.

"Do you like hot stuff?" a woman with silver curls asked me.

"Not this early in the morning, usually," I said.

"Well," she said—and when I thought about it later it occurred to me that I had stumbled across a defining metaphor—"there's a lot of mild stuff, too."



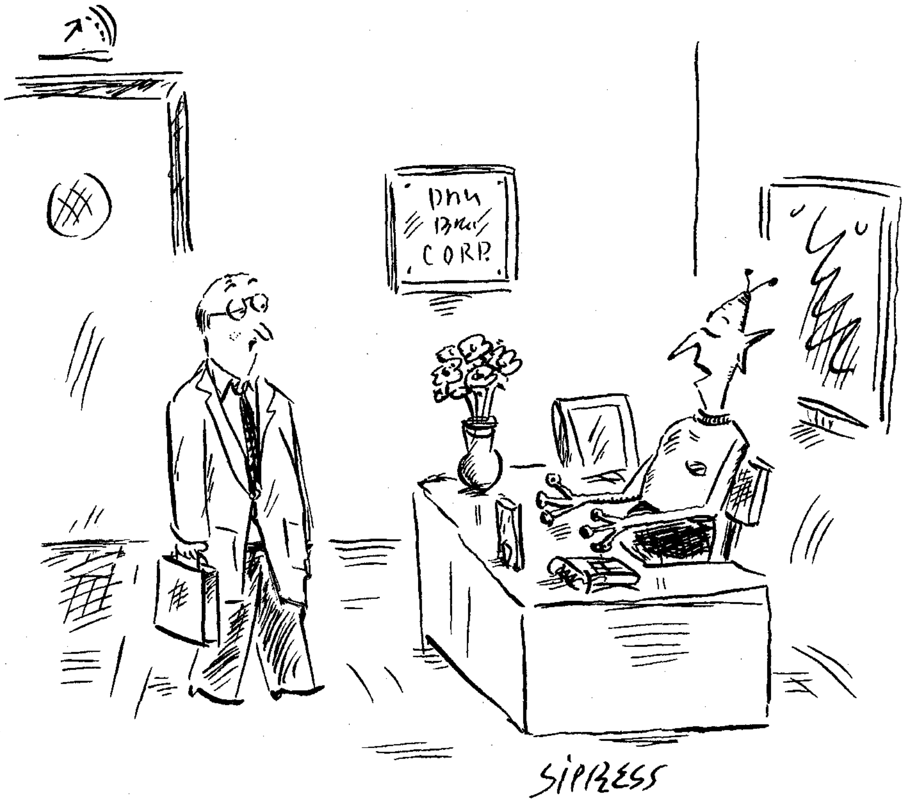
rce of basic information. "We had to rely on the bank sign to get the word out," a resident said. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

The Itasca *Item*, the predecessor of the *Paw Print Press*, was founded in 1886, a year after the town—which came into existence because the M-K-T Railroad decided it should—was incorporated. A stately-looking broadsheet, the *Item* was produced, for most of its history, by Linotype and hot lead. From 1926 to 1985, it was owned and edited by the McDonald family—first, Donald, then his sons, Donald, Jr., and Gordon. During the Second World War, Donald, Jr., was a staff reporter and photographer for *Stars & Stripes*, stationed in Italy and North Africa. Only during wartime would the world outside Itasca—and the implicit acknowledgment that a world outside Itasca existed—intrude upon the content of the *Item*. Front page, December, 1944: photographs of two Distinguished Flying Cross recipients and an article head-lined "PFC. W. L. CHANDLER WOUNDED IN FRANCE"—also "PRESBYTERIANS AND METHODISTS OBSERVE BIBLE READING SUNDAY," "NEWS FROM THE ORPHANS' HOME," and "BOX TAILOR SHOP SELLS; TO BE KNOWN AS ITASCA CLEANERS."

The McDonalds kept it going through the indistinguishable fifties ("ITASCA GIVES $243.26 TO MARCH OF DIMES," "NEGRO HOUSES BURN," "85TH BIRTHDAY PARTY") and sixties ("ROTARY NEWS," "LIONS MEET," "ITASCA STORES TO CLOSE NEW YEAR'S") and beyond, animated by a we-love-our-town-no-matter-what editorial philosophy. One of its quintessential ingredients was the "Locals" chitchat column, which served up such morsels as "Mrs. Alva Underwood visited her daughter, Eula Gene, in Denton last week. Eula Gene accompanied her mother home for the week-end." Donald and Gordon shared the writing, Donald took lots of pictures, and they maintained an upbeat, boosterish tone even after the interstate came through and the downtown merchants got sucked under, one by one, by the shopping malls a dozen miles away in Hillsboro, the county seat. After Gordon died, in 1981, Donald sold a controlling interest to Eddie Chiles, an Itasca native and well-known industrialist (and, in his later years, a noisy right-wing populist), who upgraded the printing equipment. As Donald was declining with Alzheimer's, in the mid-eighties, Chiles sold the paper. It was sold again a couple of years later, to a not fondly remembered out-of-town couple who, in the fall of 1990, abruptly halted publication and vanished without bothering to refund prepaid subscriptions. Shortly afterward, the *Item* returned, sort of, as a labor of love by Judi Lackey Underwood, a former flight attendant, who, not quite every week, managed to put out a four-page edition. Underwood had admired the McDonalds' devotion, but she chose not to follow their hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil example. At city-council meetings, she asked pointed questions about the annual town budget. She criticized the city secretary after the town's wells ran dry. She took pictures of town employees doing work on the mayor's property. That was the point at which she sufficiently irritated the mayor—a businessman with deep pockets—that he started a rival paper, the Itasca *Express News*, to drive her out of business. Not long after he succeeded, in May of 1994, the *Express News* also disappeared.

It was Betty Sumner, the Chamber of Commerce president, who set in motion the process that led to the *Paw Print Press's* replacing the *Item* as Itasca's newspaper of record. "It upset me no end when the *Item* closed," she told me. "I was on the city council then and I would get calls all the time about things that were just idle gossip. I hate gossip." Gossip, of course, is the lifeblood of any small town—petty stuff (who donated the Victoria's Secret lingerie to the Second Baptist Church rummage sale), middling stuff (who got arrested for D.W.I. in Dallas), scandalous stuff (what married-but-not-to-each-other couple had been caught in flagrante at the Holiday Inn in Hillsboro), vital statistics (who passed away at a nursing home in Houston). The McDonalds, who were instinctively averse to controversy and only too happy to publish, say, six or ten pages of children's letters to Santa Claus because, well, why not, had drawn the line exactly where Itascans wanted it drawn. They understood that in a small town where everyone knows far too much about everyone else's business the imperative is to refrain from printing certain information that who in the hell wants to see in black and white. After the *Item* died, the town lost not only part of its social contract but its primary source of basic information. "We had to rely on the bank sign"—an electronic display outside the First State Bank building—"to get the word out," Sumner said.

Through the Chamber, Sumner had mobilized the Itasca Board of Revitalization, which included representatives of all the major organizations in town, including the government, the churches, and the school system. "In board meetings, I'd give the truth to those people," she said. "I'd tell them, 'Go to your troops and fill them in.' One day, we were meeting in the office of Ray Freeman, the school superintendent, and I said, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had some means for printing news and getting it out?' And Dr. Freeman said, 'Let's get Mrs. Petrash in here and see what we can work out.'"



"While you were out, there was a rift in the space-time continuum."

Though Barbara Petrash had been living in Itasca only since 1990, when her husband's employer transferred him to the area, she'd established a reputation for being able to juggle a remarkable number of tasks simultaneously. After marrying at fifteen and raising five children, she received her bachelor's degree at the age of forty-seven, by which time she'd already spent four years working as an aide at Itasca High School. When she began teaching full time, in 1995, the *Paw Print Press* had had a short-lived existence as a dinky monthly newsletter—an after-school project by a handful of students to which no one paid much attention. When the school superintendent proposed that Mrs. Petrash become, in effect, the editor and publisher of Itasca's weekly newspaper, it barely mattered that she had no clue about journalism. No one expected or wanted the *Paw Print Press* to become a source of enterprising, award-winning reporting. What mattered was Mrs. Petrash's cheerful demeanor, her go-along-to-get-along pliability, and the fact that she knew, and was on friendly terms with, just about everybody in town.

STEPHEN KING
THE BOOKSTORE

Back at the high school after the Chamber of Commerce–Garden Club brunch, I found a spot in a corner of Mrs. Petrash's classroom as the *Paw Print Press* personnel shuffled in for their daily meeting. She was seated at her desk, reminding staff members of their assignments and frequently answering a cordless phone ("*Paw Print Press*—how can I help you?"). Propped on a shelf behind her was a sign that said, "You Can't Be Fired. Slaves Are Sold." The *Paw Print Press* is composed and laid out on a computer, laser-printed, photocopied on eleven-by-seventeen-inch sheets, and hand-folded. On Wednesdays, when the papers are collated, folded, stapled, and labelled, Mrs. Petrash sits with Robin James, a senior and the business manager, and they cross-check a list of out-of-town subscribers. "We go to New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Florida, Arizona, Minnesota, California," she told me. "We used to have somebody in Alaska. We've never had a subscriber in Hawaii, though. I don't know why." All this is done on a three-thousand-dollar budget (half of which is earmarked for the service contract on the photocopier). There's no charge for advertisements, but donations are welcome; that income gets deposited in a college-scholarship fund for graduating staff members.

This was a Monday, and plenty of work remained to be done for the issues leading up to and spanning the Christmas break. As the students got busy (or, in a couple of cases, benignly goofed off), Mrs. Petrash recited for my benefit their strengths and weaknesses, with an emphasis upon the former. Eric Covington, who is in charge of sports coverage, blushed when she said, "Eric may be one of the best writers I've ever seen. He can throw together an article in about ten minutes that needs very little editing. He's also an athlete, so he's a member of the teams he's writing about. The only thing Eric can't do is take photographs while he's playing in a game." Of Cymbre Weatherly, she said, "She reports, she writes a column, she keeps people in line. The kids say it's her job to be mean to them. She pretty well takes over when I'm gone."

Last summer, while recovering from knee surgery, Mrs. Petrash relied upon Cymbre and a recent graduate to help her put out the paper. "The first couple of issues each summer are awards-heavy," Mrs. Petrash explained, "so we can plan those ahead of time. Except for the big barbecue cook-off in July, there's not a lot of news in Itasca in the summertime, especially with the schools closed. We do always try to have the police report, but there's not much crime. The bank was robbed in 1991."

Mrs. Petrash is a one-handed typist and a straightforward, just-the-facts writer who reserves certain assignments for herself. That afternoon, after school had been dismissed, she was at her computer, filing an account of a recent city-council meeting. The Board of Revitalization had been campaigning to have several unsightly vacant lots cleaned up, city employees had done the work, and a public discussion ensued about why taxpayers should have to foot the bill. "We have a city secretary who's sort of full of himself," Mrs. Petrash explained. "When the question came up about why bills hadn't gone out to the property owners, he said something about how these were just lots that had to be cleaned up because 'the old women' had complained. Well, the old women were the Board of Revitalization, which I happen to be a member of. He looked at me and said, 'I suppose you're going to quote me that way in the paper.' And I said, 'Yes, I am.'

"My kids are still intimidated by

Victoria Roberts

"I converse. You declaim."

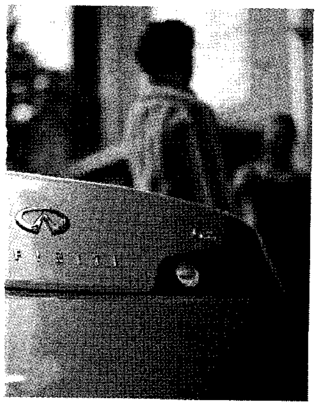
the police and city officials a little bit. I keep trying to explain to them that they're the press. There's another city-council meeting tonight. It starts at seven o'clock. We just elected a new mayor and a couple of new council members. Things are a little turmoily—the usual reasons: small-town politics, everybody knows everybody, everybody knows everything. I'm sending Cymbre, but I'm going, too."

At the city-council meeting that evening—City Hall is a double storefront on Hill Street, a block north of Itasca's traffic light—I sat in the same row as Mrs. Petrash and Cymbre, who was wearing her police-department-issued press credentials around her neck and her *Paw Print Press* T-shirt, which had printed on the back "If You Don't Like The Way The World Is, Change It." Cymbre is slender and demure and has long honey-blond hair. Two years ago, the *Paw Print Press* featured a photograph of her after she'd cut her hair and donated it to an organization that made wigs for children with cancer. Her column, "Inspiration Corner for Teens," runs on page 2 of almost every issue, and one of its consistent themes is the spiritual uplift that derives from doing good deeds. Typically, Cymbre opens with a quotation from Scripture and proceeds to deliver a proselytizing sermonette. Itasca is one of those places where no one rushes to make a fuss about the doctrine of church-state separation. Before the city council got down to business, a local pastor offered a prayer, which he concluded "in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ."

For almost fifteen minutes, the audience of a dozen or so citizens sat quietly as the mayor and five council members reviewed the town's finances. Next on the agenda was a complaint from the owners of a convenience store, who felt that they were being harassed by a member of the police force. The police chief, G. A. Couldron, was present and explained, in the manner of someone apologizing for a dog whose howling wakes up the neighbors, that he'd spoken with the officer in question and would do so again. Betty Sumner, representing the Board of Revitalization, addressed the vacant-lots issue as well as the matter of Itasca's ubiquitously potholed streets. Unexpectedly, the mayor announced that the council was going into executive session to discuss personnel matters, which meant that the public, press included, had to vacate the premises. Cymbre decided to head home and I decided to head to dinner, each of us knowing that we'd get the lowdown the following day from Mrs. Petrash, who spent the next hour and a half waiting outside the locked front door of City Hall, with her bum knee killing her. At a certain point, the police chief reappeared, wearing his house slippers. Inside, the city council gave him the choice of retiring or being fired and he chose the former. The officer who had been the object of the complaint from the convenience-store owners was fired, and another officer was named interim police chief. This was by far the most eventful city-council session Itasca (and the *Paw Print Press*) had witnessed in several years.

At school the next morning, when I heard this news from Mrs. Petrash, she said, "As of today, Geoff Couldron, the police chief, is retiring. I've already gotten two phone calls from him. He says he turned sixty in May, he's been in law enforcement for thirty-six years uninterrupted, including nine years as chief. And his quote is 'It's time to get out of the business and enjoy my family.' Now, was this provoked by anything? Yes, but that's not what we're going to report. They gave him the option of retiring and that will be our story. I'm going to redo the city-council report I was typing yesterday. Basically, I'll just add this news to the bottom of that."

And that was, indeed, how the *Paw Print Press* played the police chief's abrupt departure that week: in twenty words, uninflected, unencumbered by analysis or, in the weeks that followed, op-ed thumb-sucking (though the paper plans to publish interviews with both Chief Couldron and his successor). None of which, of course, distinguishes the *Paw Print Press* as an exemplar of small-town-weekly journalism. The paper doesn't deliver much in the way of trenchant reporting or imaginative feature writing. Nor, with the exception of a successful campaign in 1997 to adopt a new stray-dog ordinance, has it earned a reputation for bold editorials. But for the past five years the *Paw Print Press* has restored a cohesiveness that Itasca lacked when the town was newspaperless, and each week it accomplishes one truly remarkable thing: it appears in mailboxes and next to cash registers throughout Itasca. Then it gets read. It provides a text, and readers go about the gratifying business of excavating the unwritten subtext. Whatever the naked truth



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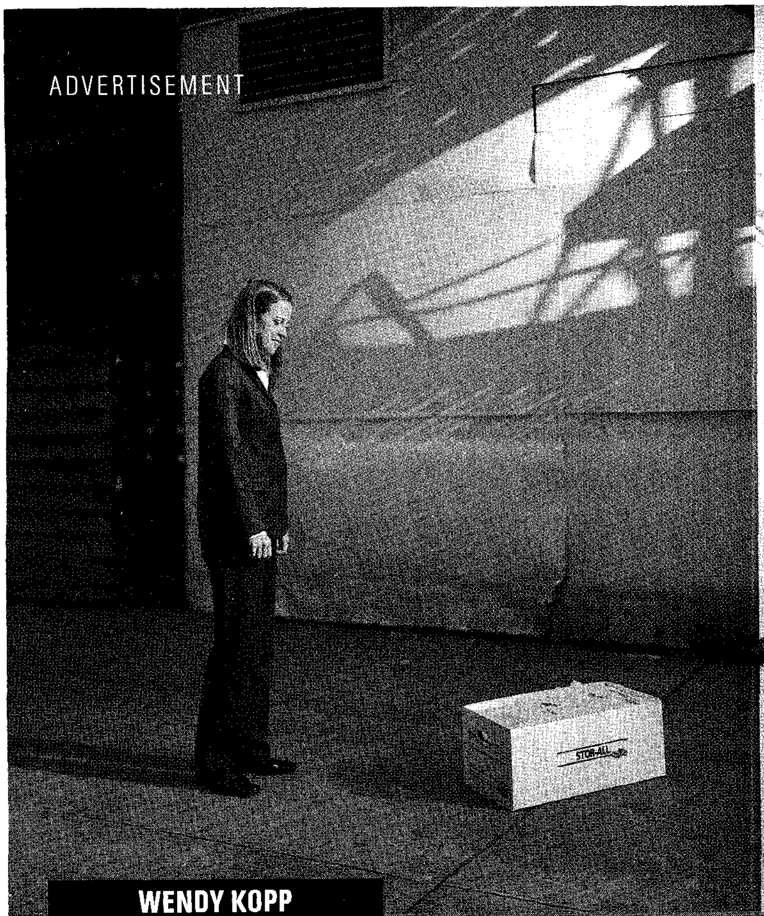

WENDY KOPP

Wendy Kopp set out to build a movement to ensure that children in low-income communities have the educational opportunities they deserve. Her organization, Teach for America, drafts talented recent college graduates to commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools and to become lifelong advocates in the cause of educational equality.

A million children in cities across the country have a safe and accessible place to play thanks to Darell Hammond's nonprofit KaBOOM! organization. With generous funding from corporations and foundations, KaBOOM! has enlisted the efforts of local communities to build or revitalize more than 1,000 playgrounds.

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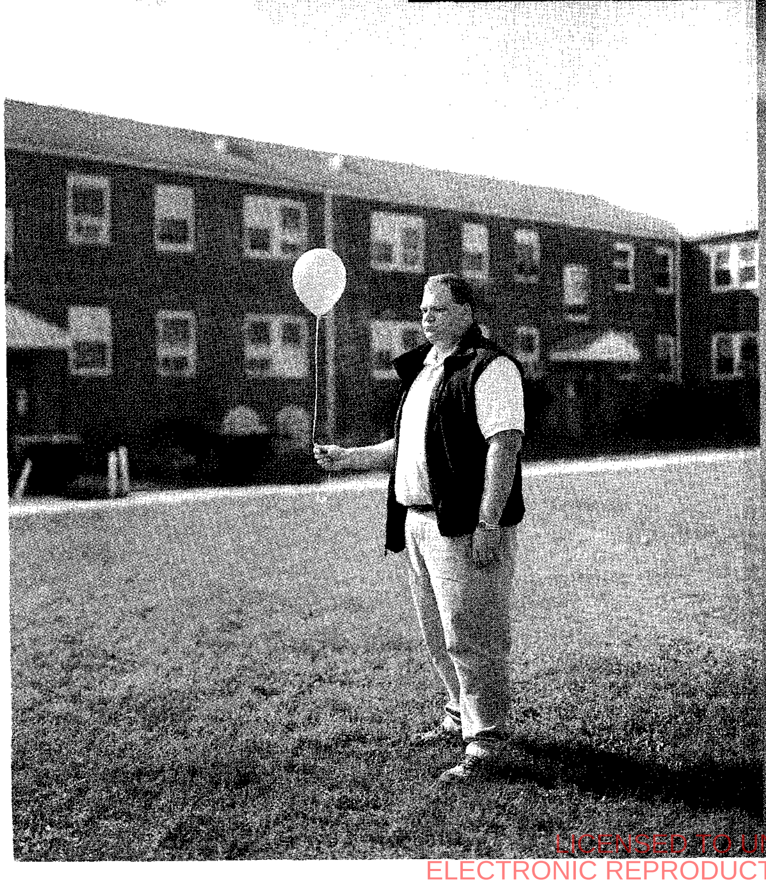

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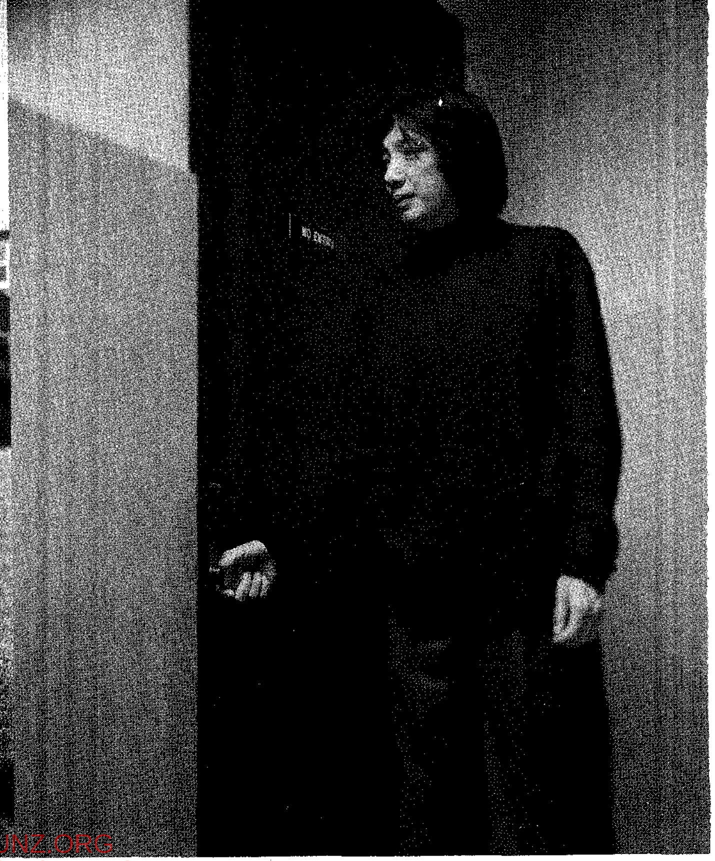
In 1989, a group of Chinese scientists and scholars founded the Human Rights in China (HRIC) organization to expand and protect the rights of their fellow citizens. Under the leadership of Executive Director Xiao Qiang, HRIC effectively achieves these goals through traditional and creative research, education, and advocacy both within China and throughout the international community.

XIAO QIANG



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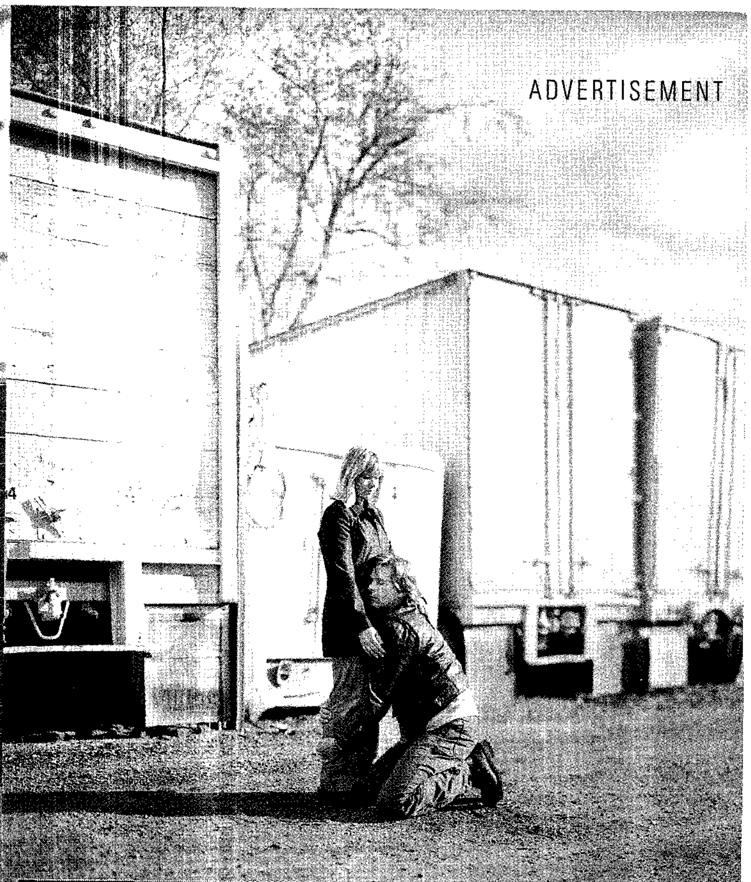
JUAN ENRIQUEZ

Juan Enriquez is Director of the Harvard Business School Life Science Project and author of *As The Future Catches You: How Genomics & Other Forces Are Changing Your Life, Work, Health & Wealth.* He has served as CEO of Mexico City's Urban Development Corporation, chief of staff for Mexico's Secretary of State, and helped negotiate the cease fire in the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas.



DAWN ENGLE & IVAN SUVANIJEFF

Engle and Suvanijeff founded PeaceJam in 1996 to inspire a new generation of peacemakers. This international education program invites Nobel peace laureates to work personally with youth to pass on the spirit, skills, and wisdom they embody. Eleven Nobel laureates have joined the program thus far, including the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

CHRISTINE VACHON

Positioned at the vanguard of cinema, Christine Vachon and her production company, Killer Films, have nurtured the careers of a bold generation of independent filmmakers exploring life outside of the American mainstream. Vachon's producing credits include *Safe, One Hour Photo, Boys Don't Cry, I Shot Andy Warhol, Kids,* and *Far From Heaven.*

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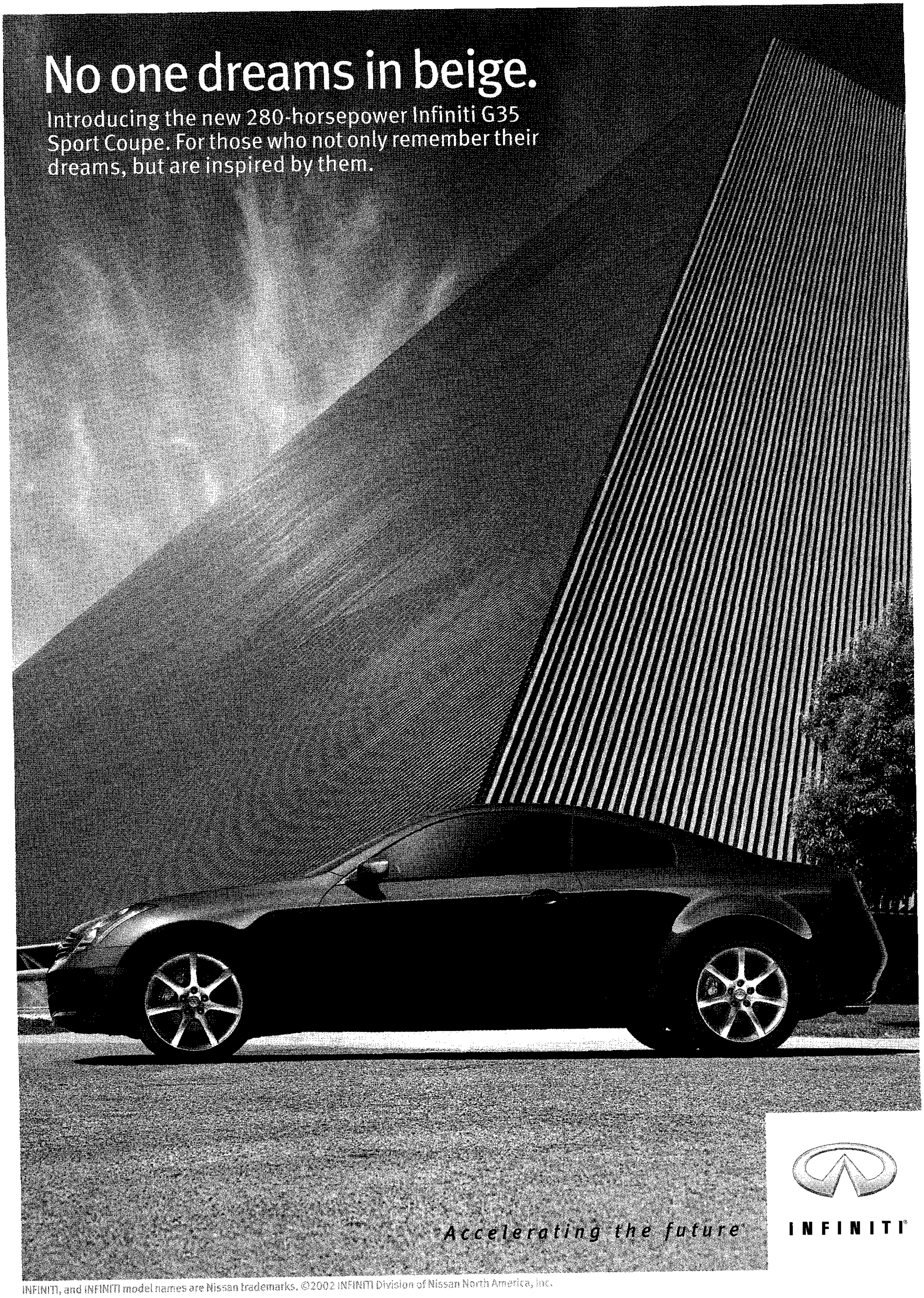**No one dreams in beige.**

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was about the police chief, no one in Itasca was likely to object to the etiquette of having a cut-and-dried newspaper narrative running parallel to the more baroque narrative that would get chewed over for the next several days at Jimmy's Corner Store and Janet's Beauty Barn.

Thursday morning, when I walked into the classroom, Mrs. Petrash was giving Eric Covington and Cory Bourland instructions before they went to the First State Bank to photograph employees posing with an all-poinsettia Christmas tree. "You know who looks good and you know what to do as to who's short, who's tall, whatever," she said. "Remember, you're the photographer, they want their picture made. You're the boss." Most of the rest of the staff was out and about—Robin James and Holly Faulkner were driving around town distributing copies to merchants, and a few other people were canvassing the elementary, middle, and high schools, selling copies discounted from a quarter to a dime—so the ambience was more subdued than usual. Though Mrs. Petrash had plenty to do for the upcoming issue, she was still reflecting upon the city-council meeting. "We've never had a shakeup like that. It kind of makes me wonder who's running the town," she said. "I had a call at home last night after nine-thirty from a councilman wanting to know what we had in the paper about the City Hall meeting. He couldn't wait. I said, 'I just wrote down what you-all said.' "

All week, I'd been looking forward to immersing myself in the *Paw Print Press* archives, the five years' worth of back issues that were stored in a couple of file cabinets in the corner of the room. Mrs. Petrash led me there now and began pulling them out for my perusal. There was no shortage of Wampus Cats sports coverage. Also: a new flagpole at the cemetery, a skunk trapped in a garbage can on school property, a front-page feature about an Itasca High grad who had become a "top dog debater" at Southwest Texas State University, news from the local nursing home, Cinco de Mayo celebration updates, a visit to Itasca by Fox's play-by-play football announcer Pat Summerall, an increase in security at the Dollar General Store.

"Here's one I like," Mrs. Petrash said. "They were digging the foundation for the technology center here at the school, and it started raining. It rained many days, so we ran a picture and a caption that said you could sign up for the swim team. And we had students coming in to sign up. We had to tell them, 'Hey, it's a joke.'

"We used to have a feature called 'Yard of the Week.' We'd run a photograph of a house in town and write a nice caption. We dropped it. I guess we ran out of yards to brag about. Anyway, this is a 'Yard of the Week' that I remember very well. These people got a divorce, and the father came to me and wanted a copy of the paper. He wanted to show what a good father he was, and the proof was he put in a little playhouse for his children.

"Look here. This was written by the superintendent's daughter. She wanted to write a golf column, so we had a golf column. And we don't even have a golf course. Well, you have to be innovative.

"Some of the summer issues we put out are a little skimpy. We've been so desperate we've run stories on grasshoppers. I have one in here where I took this grasshopper, put him on my dining-room table, and took his picture. The caption said, 'Wanted for Mass Destruction: Dead or in a Jar.' They'd been eating crops. It's a matter of, anything we've got in the summertime, we'll put it on the front page.

"Oh, O.K., here's what I was looking for. We had a fire four years ago that destroyed a half block of historic buildings downtown. And a couple of restaurant owners prepared free meals for volunteers at the scene. Well, one Itasca resident went down there and got six to-go plates and took them home to his family. Believe it or not, it was a minister. We thought it was awful, so we ran an editorial about it. After that, he didn't last long. We didn't name names, but we didn't need to. Everyone knew." ♦

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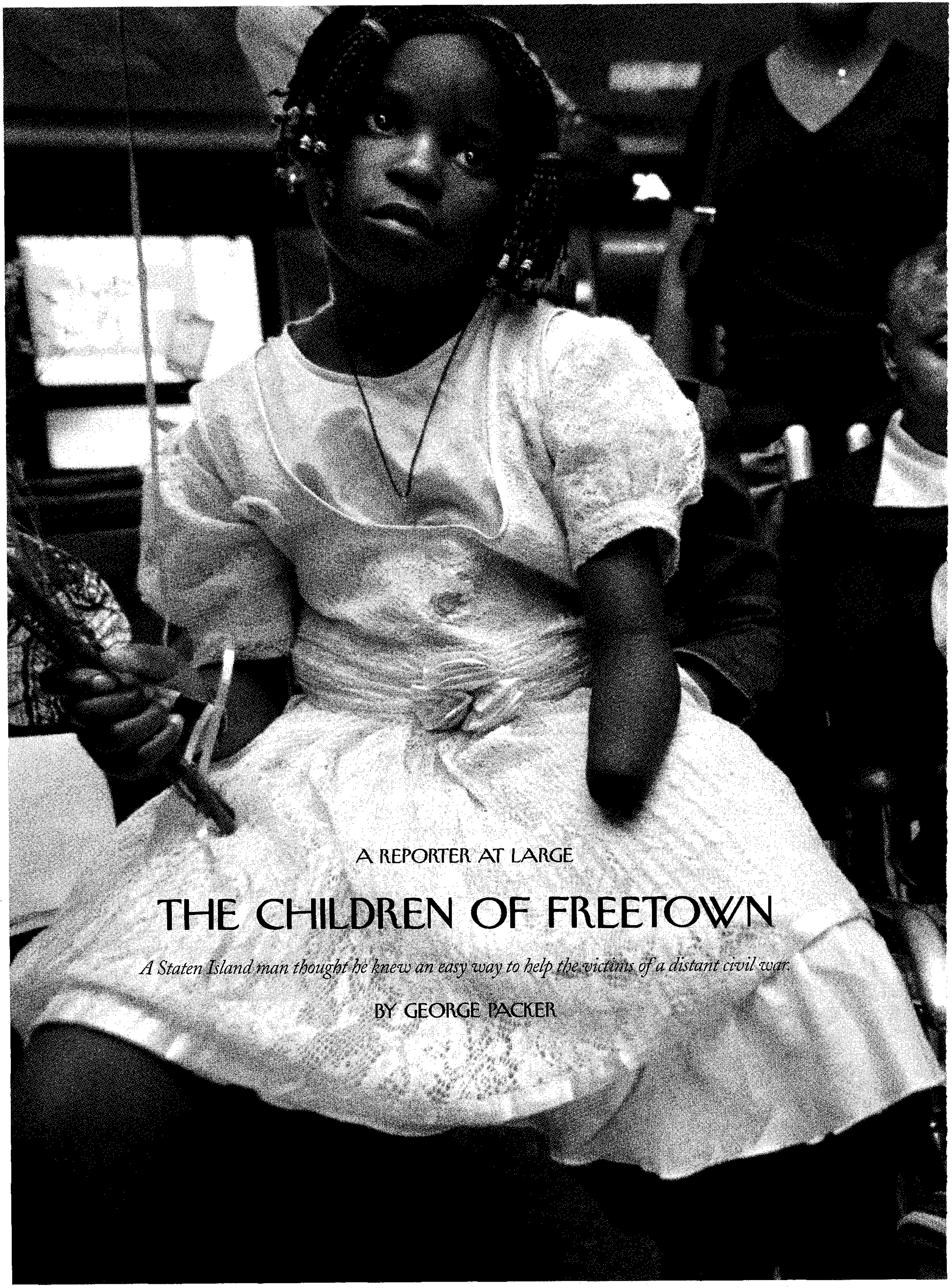


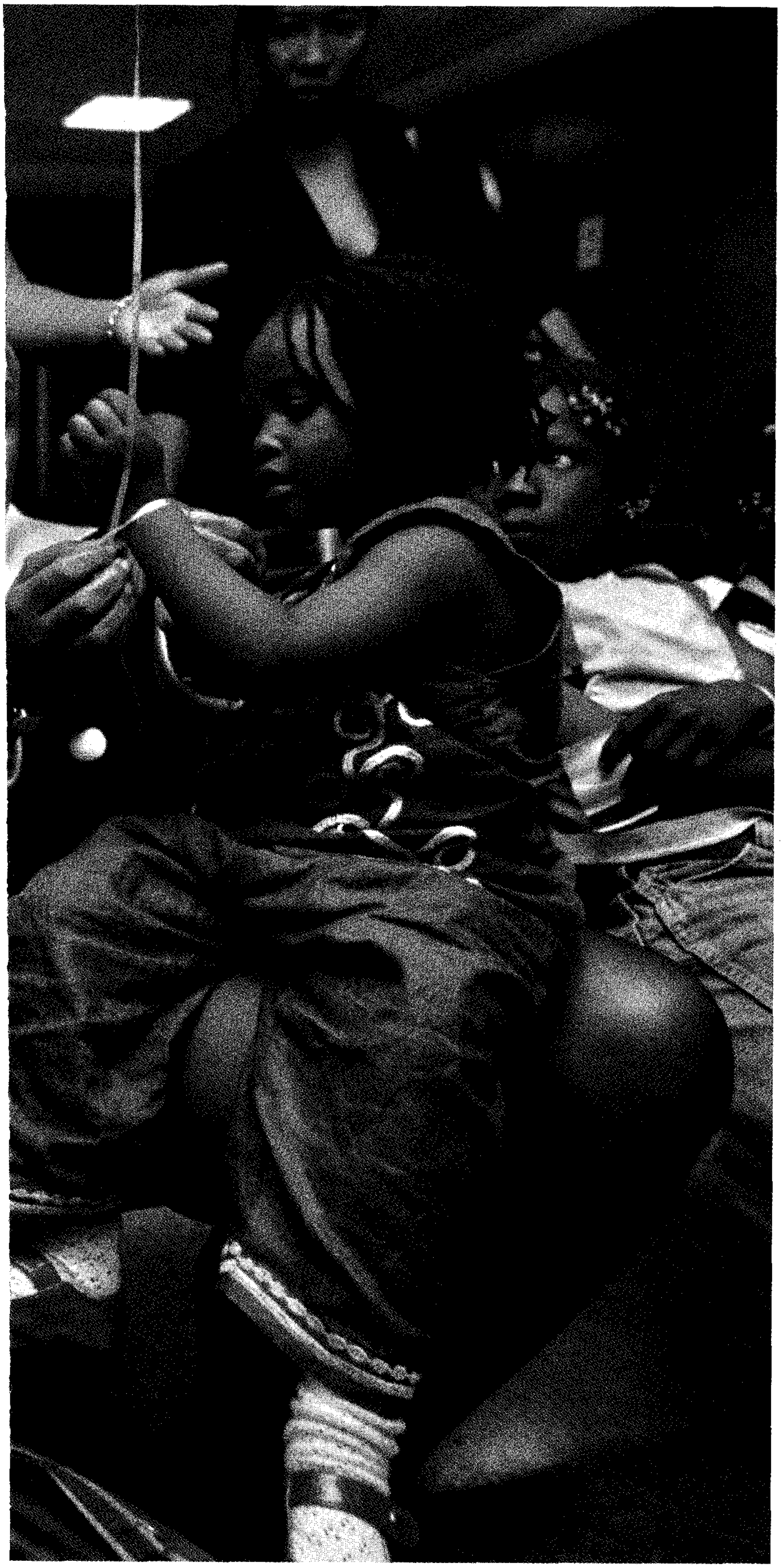
A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE CHILDREN OF FREETOWN

A Staten Island man thought he knew an easy way to help the victims of a distant civil war.

BY GEORGE PACKER

A group of child amputees from Sierra Leone arriving at Dulles airport on their way to New York. Damba (left) was eight. Mem



ter), who was four, lost her right arm in the fighting. Photograph by Carol Guzy.

Every day, Americans are confronted with news of horrors throughout the world which seem both vividly intimate and impossibly distant; helpless outrage is a characteristic emotion of the global age. On an October afternoon three years ago, a New Yorker named Matthew Mirones was glancing through the *Times'* Week in Review section when he came upon a photo essay on war amputees in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, on the West African coast. A boy, his right arm gone to the shoulder, was being bathed by his mother. A man, missing both hands, was trying to write his name with the hook of an artificial arm. A teen-age girl, also a double amputee, was lying at the water's edge with her stumps glistening in the surf. Mirones, who had never heard of this war—and had barely heard of Sierra Leone—felt the hair on his arms stand up.

Amputation has been the signature atrocity of Sierra Leone's civil war, which went on for eleven years and ended last January. The most credible estimates of the number of war amputees which I heard ranged from two thousand to four thousand, with perhaps twice that many dead from their wounds. (The Western press usually puts the number of war amputees at twenty thousand.) Whatever the number, reports and photographs of civilians—many of them children—missing ears, lips, legs, and hands finally drew international attention to the long-neglected war and played a role in bringing it to an end.

As Mirones read, he felt acute shame, and a rising excitement. Mirones is a prosthetist—he makes artificial limbs. "I said, 'This is my profession, and I'm not *aware* of this—that people are being disfigured?' " he told me recently. "Before I even finished the article, in my mind I said, 'I've got to try to do something here. I mean, I know I could help these people.' "

Mirones, a small man with a highly mobile face dominated by a black mustache, is a forty-six-year-old bachelor. Though he now lives on Staten Island, his speech and manner remain in Brooklyn, the borough where he was born, grew up, and has his main office, on a lively, seedy downtown street, next to a wig shop advertising "100% Human Hair."

Mirones's grandfather was a village

cobbler on the Greek island of Chios. Mirones's father, Aristotle, immigrated to Brooklyn after the Second World War and set up a small prosthetics company called Arimed, below the apartment on Atlantic Avenue where Mirones spent his early years, three blocks from the firm's current headquarters. Mirones grew up in the business; by the age of seven, he was making deliveries around downtown Brooklyn, holding shopping bags at shoulder level to keep them from dragging on the pavement. When older kids surrounded him and tried to steal the leg braces and shoe inserts, he would talk his way out of trouble in the quick, ingratiating, street-smart manner that he still uses.

When Mirones speaks of his patients, a nervous physical empathy takes over, and his face and body get involved in the exaggerated way of a mime: his eyes narrow in pain, his mouth stretches out and down, his torso collapses against the desk as his whole arm up to the shoulder is pulled into a recycling machine; his ankle buckles and he slips into the jolting hobble of a diabetic who has lost sensation in his feet.

Mirones trained at New York University, and is an American board-certified prosthetist, a qualification that enabled him to greatly expand Arimed's operations and increase its sophistication. Yet he still can't help using the word "stump." "We call it a residual, not a stump," he corrects himself, for my benefit, but a minute later he uses the word again. "This is Mr. Montoya," he says, picking up the plaster model of a stump lying on a worktable in Arimed's second-floor lab. (Mr. Montoya's lower right leg was shot off by narcotics traffickers in the Medellín, Colombia, airport.) The lab looks like the studio of a sculptor in the grip of a macabre vision of the lower extremities.

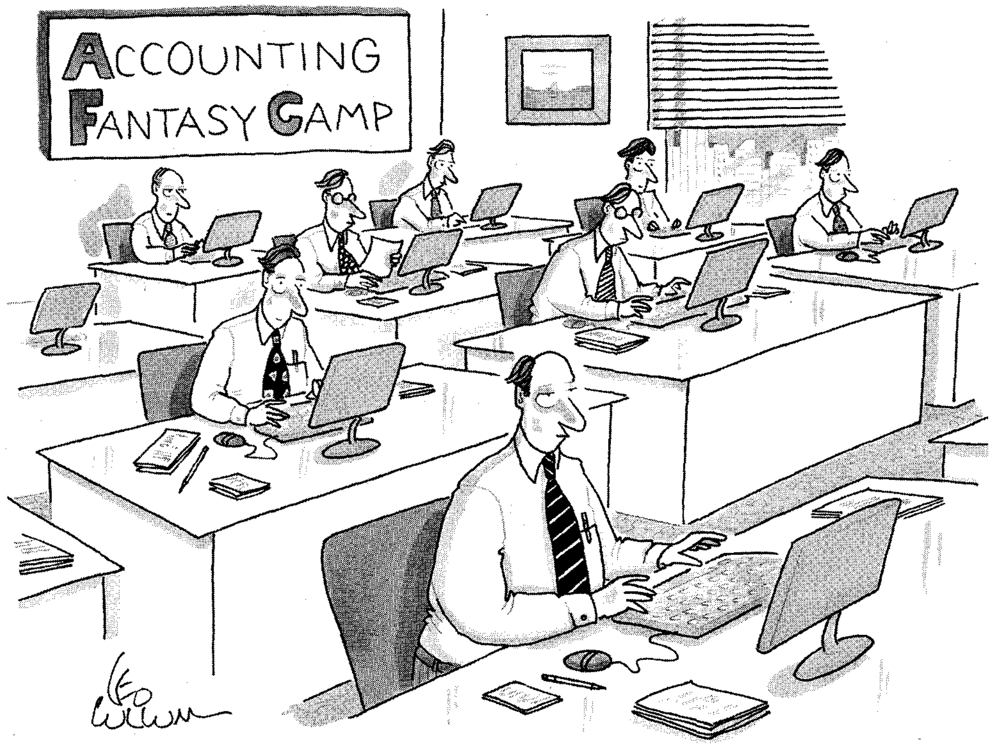
It was not as a professional humanitarian with global ideas but as a small businessman, an outer-borough Republican, and a craftsman that Mirones decided to involve himself in an African calamity. His purpose, he said, was "to integrate the concept of life with disability over there, so that people will be more willing to accept their disability and work with what they have and use the devices to be self-sufficient." He decided that he would bring a small group of child amputees to New York, fit them with prostheses, train the children in using them, and then send them home to be "beacons of hope" to a desperate population.

Mirones approached several large non-governmental organizations, or N.G.O.s, such as the Red Cross, but found them unhelpful. "Everyone had to go through committee, and 'We'll bring it up at our annual or semi-annual or next quarter's meeting,'" he said. It affronted his can-do business sense and his idea of self-reliance. "I just felt that the more focussed I stayed, the leaner and cleaner I stayed, the fewer people involved, I probably could be more effective."

But, if he was going to bring a group of Sierra Leonean amputees to New York, Mirones would need help, and he looked for it in his own community. Staten Island University Hospital agreed to give free surgery and medical care. Local Rotary Clubs, led by a printshop owner named Joe Mandarino, agreed to organize food, housing, and transportation. The story of mutilated children seemed to render any objections moot. And as long as the children remained an abstraction, everyone who signed on to Mirones's idea wanted the same thing: to help.

Sierra Leone's civil war began in 1991, when a cashiered Army corporal and itinerant photographer named Foday Sankoh brought a group of a hundred fighters, called the Revolutionary United Front, across the Liberian border and into the eastern jungles. The men had been trained in Libya, and the rebellion was backed by Charles Taylor, who was fighting his own war in Liberia. (He was elected President in 1997.) Sierra Leone's diamond mines fuelled the R.U.F.'s operations—stones were smuggled out through Liberia, and weapons, mostly small arms, entered the same way—and the rebellion early on lost any claim to a purpose higher than organized crime.

Yet a number of people in Sierra Leone told me that they had initially welcomed the news of a rebellion. "All of us, we were waiting for this spark," Dennis Bright, a professor of French who works with street boys in Freetown, said. Three decades after independence from the British, the regime in power was hopelessly corrupt and utterly indifferent to the despair of a generation of young people without prospects. The élite in



Freetown sent their children out of the country; the economy was controlled, almost entirely off the books, by an alliance of Western companies, Lebanese middlemen, and venal officials. "I describe this thing that has happened to us as a new kind of war," Bright said. It transcended any ethnic or religious basis; it had no coherent ideology; it was largely a war of children and youth. "Somebody comes with some political thing and says the thing is ready to happen," Bright went on. "But, when it starts, the venom itself surpasses whatever political thing might have sparked it. This is why the vandalism, the unbridled terror, are just expressions of people being left out. This is the injustice of the war. The perpetrators can get only those they can reach. The poor people are doubly victims."

When the R.U.F. began brutally targeting civilians, the rebellion lost whatever chance of support it might have had among most Sierra Leoneans and the outside world. In 1996, in an election that was the freest in the country's history, a United Nations official named Ahmad Tejan Kabbah became President. His slogan, "The future is in your hands," prompted the first rash of amputations by the R.U.F., who told their victims to ask the President for new hands. But the majority of the war's atrocities took place in two campaigns of terror. The first, in early 1998, followed a coup that temporarily overthrew Kabbah and replaced him with an alliance between elements of the armed forces and the R.U.F., who increasingly had come to resemble each other. (It's a common mistake to attribute all the war's atrocities against civilians to the rebels; many of the worst were committed by the Sierra Leone Army.) When Nigerian-led peacekeeping troops drove the junta out of Freetown, in February, 1998, and restored the ineffectual Kabbah, soldiers and rebels in the north and east went on a rampage. It was called Operation Pay Yourself. Whatever the men with guns could get, they were entitled to keep.

Muctar Jalloh, a man in his early twenties, had come to the town of Koidu, in the east, to dig for diamonds with his uncle. Jalloh had been a student in the north, but his family needed money and he had to leave high school and try to earn a living in the dangerous diamond business. When Operation Pay Yourself hit the region, he, his uncle, his uncle's wife, and their two children fled into the bush. There they stayed for two months, foraging for food, hiding from rebels who sometimes passed within twenty feet of them. The children's legs swelled for lack of salt. Jalloh had been a Boy Scout, and he used his compass, water bottle, and knife to help the group survive, but eventually he got rid of his kit for fear of being caught and suspected of being a soldier. In a notebook, he recorded each day's activities: went east, southeast, searched for food, saw rebels and dashed. He called what he was writing "Struggle in the Bush."

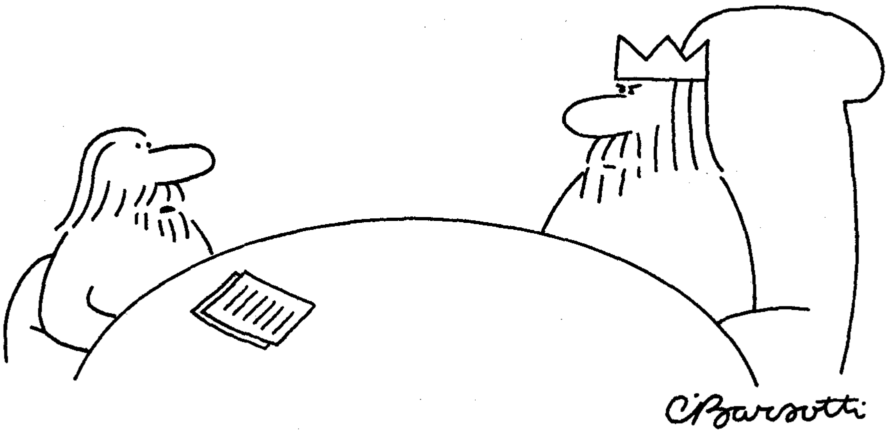
Then Jalloh and his family heard that Nigerian troops had recaptured Koidu. On the morning of April 19th, they decided to risk going home, but on the road they fell into a trap. About thirty rebel soldiers, mostly teen-agers, were hiding behind trees. They burned Jalloh's possessions: his Scout I.D., his school jacket, trousers, and tie, a paperback novel he'd taken from an abandoned village while searching for food, and "Struggle in the Bush." Then they hogtied him on a stick suspended between a tree and a rock. All afternoon, the rebels brought in more civilian prisoners. Jalloh watched as, one after another, six men were beheaded in front of him. He was told that he would be the seventh.

"I knew I'm going there," Jalloh recalled. "The way he was, I will be here soon." Jalloh thought about his mother and how he would die before he could help her. A Muslim, he prayed, "Oh, God, if this is the way, forgive my sins. Lord, this is the way you destined for my death. O.K., I thank you for that."

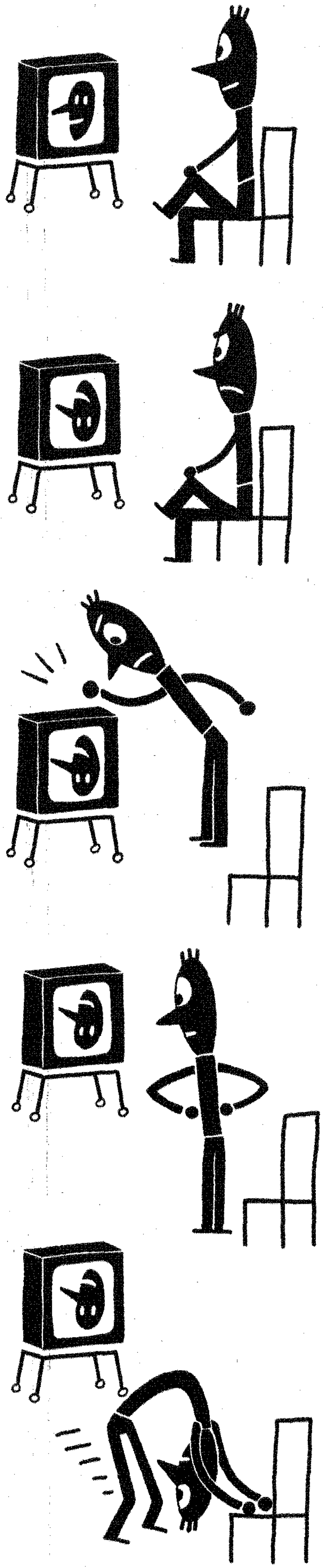
At some point, the commander, whose nom de guerre was Savage, sent a soldier off in the direction of a noise, with orders to bring back human hearts. The soldier returned with a sack of them, and others cooked and ate them. Jalloh found himself "trying to die."

Five hours later, the rebels untied Jalloh and took him to a felled mango tree. When he realized that they intended to cut off his hand, Jalloh laid his left arm on the tree and begged, "Please cut my left hand. I'm a student. My right hand is my future." A rebel hit his left hand with the back of a machete, and said, "This is not the hand I want. If you fail to put your right hand, I'm going to kill you." Jalloh was struck in the head with a gun butt and a machete. The rebels ordered his uncle to hold down Jalloh's right arm. Jalloh told his uncle that he wasn't to blame.

A sharp machete delivered the first hard blow. Jalloh got to his feet, thinking it was over, but his hand was still partially attached a few inches above the wrist. Rebels held his arm against a tree and began hacking, but now they were using a duller machete, and it required many blows to cut through the bone. Commander Savage fired a shot at the uncle's right hand and had it severed. Machetes hacked at Jalloh's thigh and shoulder,



"You might try avuncular."



PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

and then someone cut off his right ear. He lost consciousness.

When he came to, the rest of the family had scattered. (A year later, Jalloh learned that his uncle had managed to run off, but his wife and their two children had been abducted by the rebels. The wife became the possession of a young rebel; the four-year-old boy was conscripted as a porter; and the baby, when he wouldn't stop crying, was thrown into a latrine and died.) Jalloh staggered a few feet, until shooting started, and then he hid under a tree ("which the Lord used for my safety") as bullets showered around him. Darkness was falling, and it had begun to rain. "The rebels stayed awhile and went away, and I managed to walk and stay in a broken house," he recalled. There he spent a painful, sleepless night.

The next day, still bleeding, he walked five miles and finally met Nigerian troops, who bound his wounds. Two weeks later, his stump swollen and infested with maggots, he and a number of other wounded people were taken by armed convoy to Freetown for surgery, and were placed in refugee camps around the city. Jalloh was in despair. He told me, "I know what my hand did for me whenever I think of my writing, because I love writing. I love to take pen and write whatever I want, just write, write, write." He thought that no one would ever love him or want to marry him. "I was thinking how I was before and I shall never be that way again."

Then a group of amputees with no hands at all arrived at the camp. "I have my hand," he realized. "I saw that I'm better than that. It was after a year and a month that I finally accepted myself as I am."

The double amputees were victims of the second wave of terror, called Operation No Living Thing. It peaked on January 6, 1999, with a surprise attack on Freetown by rebel infiltrators and remnants of the Army who called themselves the West Side Boys, because it made them sound like American gangsters. Thousands in the city were killed, and hundreds more were mutilated. Only a fierce counterattack by Nigerian-led troops kept the capital from falling to the rebels, but as the rebels retreated east they laid waste to miles of Freetown's poor, densely populated neighborhoods and suburbs. The violence was extraordinarily cruel and personal. Victims were raped, dismembered, or burned alive while the rebels taunted them; family members were forced to watch, and even to perform atrocities; boy conscripts returned to their old neighborhoods to settle scores. Commanders with names like Captain 2 Hands and Betty Cut Hands organized special amputation squads in neighborhoods from which the rebels were retreating. The grounds of Kissy Mental Hospital, where patients are chained to concrete floors, became a central mutilating zone.

A squad of nine rebels abducted a thirteen-year-old girl named Mariama Conteh, who was living with relatives, and five other teen-agers. The girls were taken to the mental hospital and gang-raped, then were made to lie face down with their arms on some stones used for cooking. Mariama's left hand was nearly severed by an axe; the back of her right wrist sustained a deep cut, but she got up and ran away before the rebels could finish. She fell and broke her leg, got up and ran again, passed out, came to, and kept running till she reached home. Her aunt had fled. She asked her uncle for water; he said he couldn't help her and ran off with his grandchildren into the bush. Alone, naked, her left hand attached by nothing but flesh, Mariama went out again and finally found her aunt, who with a broken bottle completed the amputation of Mariama's left hand. For two days, Mariama hid among trees and in unfinished houses, her wounds untreated, and eventually got to a local hospital, but a doctor told her that rebels were lying in wait to amputate the other hand of people who came in with one hand still attached. Three days after the attack, Nigerian troops found her and took her to the city's main hospital. Her right hand was saved, but she had a bone infection in her leg for which she couldn't afford antibiotics. Mariama ended up with hundreds of others in a camp for amputees and war wounded run by Doctors Without Borders, in the western part of Freetown.

An American named Corinne Dufka lived around the corner from the camp. Dufka is the Human Rights Watch representative in Sierra Leone, and over the past four years she has meticulously recorded the atrocities. "Believe me, it's the thing of the future, this kind of rebellion," she told me. "Because of the frustrated youth—millions of frustrated youth sitting in slum areas looking at their role models doing nothing but stealing from them and exploiting them. It's all about survival. In conversations here, food is so important." Parents know that a certain number of their children will die—unless they can get what Dufka calls an "edge." She said, "A big part of life in Africa is getting an edge. For some, it's the military. For others, it's the R.U.F. And for others it's a foreigner."

Through the office of his congressman, Vito Fossella, Mirones was put in touch with an advocacy group called the Friends of Sierra Leone, made up of former Peace Corps volunteers and Sierra Leoneans living in the United States. He talked to a Sierra Leonean émigrée named Etta Touré, a tall, soft-spoken woman who works for a defense contractor in Arlington, Virginia. When I met her at the company's offices, she told me that the town where she grew up, in the north of Sierra Leone, had ceased to exist.

Of all the atrocities, Touré said, amputation was the worst. "The visual evidence that we have is going to be around us forever," she said. "The dead—after a while you forget, unless it's your own family. But this is something that's going to be permanent in our history, especially the children who will grow up and be like that always." Touré and the Friends of Sierra Leone had spent years trying to track down people uprooted by the war, and to get the attention of the United States government—without much success. In her company's photocopying room, a sign was posted to remind employees about the need for security. It said, "Countries Don't Have Friends—They Have Interests!" Every time she saw it, Touré thought about her country of birth. "It translates, 'Sierra Leone is not of interest,' " she said.

Mirones and Touré found what they were looking for in each other. Touré agreed with Mirones: they would approach the problem directly instead of trying to work through indifferent governments or sluggish international organizations. They wouldn't deal with the N.G.O.s in Sierra Leone. Touré asked a cousin in Freetown, who sometimes visited the amputee camp with money or toys, to take snapshots of amputees with their stumps clearly visible. In the summer of 2000, a Federal Express envelope containing about twenty-five photographs arrived at the Arimed office.

Mirones waited until he was alone, at the end of the day, to look at the photographs. "I wanted maybe just to dwell on it, and enjoy the moment of having them actually in my hand—the actual people in my hand that I could help," he said.

It is a shock to see small bodies so damaged and deformed—an arm ending too soon in a scarred and ingrown fold of skin, a thigh sewn closed like a drawstring pouch. Most of the children stand against the background of a plastic sheet, dirty white with blue horizontal stripes—the international building material of refugee camps. Soaked in sunlight, they present themselves for view: an arm extended, a leg held up. There are no smiles, except for one girl who manages to turn up the ends of her mouth as she leans on a wooden crutch and displays her left thigh with her right hand: Bintu Amara, age eight. (The names and ages are written on the back of the photographs.) The children's eyes are flat, without expectation. They know why they're posing, what needs to be seen.

In each photograph, Mirones was looking at the length of the residual limb. The longer the limb, the better the outcome. The rebels were said to ask certain victims whether they wanted "short sleeve" or "long sleeve," meaning above or below the elbow. For prosthetic purposes, long sleeve was best. Mirones wanted a mixture of legs and arms, bilateral amputees as well as unilateral, boys and girls. Above all, he wanted children. "This may sound a little coarse, but I think that, to make it more compelling and more sensitive to the average person, seeing a child who's been hurt in such a way is much more powerful than an adult," he told me. It didn't take him long to make his choices. "It was pretty obvious who was going to be a good prosthetic candidate."

Mirones's original list included six girls ranging in age from eight to sixteen, including Mariama Conteh, and one four-year-old boy who didn't live at the camp but happened to be there on the day the photographs were taken. Etta Touré insisted that a four-year-old girl named Memunatu be included. Mirones had wanted to leave her out; her amputation was well above the elbow. But Memuna, as she is called, had become the poster child for the amputees: her picture had once hung at the United Nations. Sierra Leone's President Kabbah took her to Lomé, Togo, for the July, 1999, signing of the peace accord that gave the rebels a share of power. (Within a year, the R.U.F. had broken the accord.) At the ceremony, Foday Sankoh apologized for Memuna's suffering. But upon returning home from Lomé the President deposited her back in the amputee camp. Etta Touré believed that the little girl deserved medical care in the United States. So Memuna was added to the list.

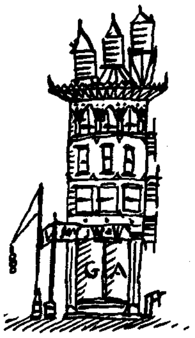
Two bilateral amputees whom Mirones had selected, teen-age girls, had gone to Guinea, acting on a rumor that amputees were receiving visas to the United States there (the rumor proved false); and so they missed their chance. But Mirones wanted at least one upper-extremity bilateral—by far the most disabling amputation—and at the last minute a forty-seven-year-old man named Tommy Foday, who had been a driver for the ruling party until he lost both hands, was added to the list, along with Muctar Jalloh, whose English made him a likely spokesman for the group.

On September 21, 2000, almost a year after Mirones first learned of the devastation in Sierra Leone, two adult and six child amputees, along with two women acting as chaperons, arrived at Washington Dulles International Airport. The Washington *Post* and television news reporters covered the event. The next day, at a welcoming ceremony in an African church outside Washington, Mirones got his first look at his new patients. At one point, they were called to the front to sing Sierra Leone's national anthem in Krio, the country's lingua franca. They sang seated, but

Tommy Foday eventually stood up and began to weep. He was wearing tinted glasses, and someone took them off to wipe his eyes.

The group testified before the House Subcommittee on Africa. Upon arrival in New York, they met the City Council and received a proclamation of welcome. They were taken to Staten Island, where Joe Mandarino and the Rotary Club arranged housing for them, eventually setting them up in a condominium near Staten Island University Hospital. Finally, a week after landing in the United States, the amputees arrived at Arimed's Brooklyn office. There Mirones and his staff put all other work on hold and began to make plaster casts of their stumps and fit them with prostheses.

The Sierra Leoneans were model patients. Two four-year-olds required revision surgery, because their bones were pencilling—growing conically through the skin in sharp, painful points. Mariama, who had lost one hand and nearly lost the other, was so weakened by the bone infection that she might have died had she remained in the camp; she was put on a regimen of antibiotics. There were respiratory infections, evidence of exposure to tuberculosis and hepatitis, malnutrition, gynecological complications as a result of rape. And, of course, the patients needed to learn to use their new arms and legs. Mohammed, the four-year-old boy, whose left leg had been blown off just below the knee by bomb fragments and whose right leg had been rendered useless, was fitted with a limb and a brace and immediately began to walk, with the unbridled delight of a child who'd been crawling almost all his life. When he had arrived, he was nearly mute; walking made him garrulous. The girls, morbidly shy at first, put on the new devices and dedicated themselves to rehabilitation therapy. Dr. Jeffrey Weinberg, the chairman of rehabilitation medicine at Staten Island University Hospital, said, "After they were given prosthetics, they became totally different children."



Sierra Leoneans seldom say, "My hand was amputated." They say, "I was amputated." Erik Duret, a French psychologist treating amputees in Freetown, told me that when he sees his patients they continue to show him the stump. "Sometimes it's so present, so painful, that they are no longer anything but that," he said. "The amputated part takes the place of the whole." A stump moves as if of its own will, like something blind and mute that has attached itself to the body. The arm has lost its face and voice; especially in the case of a double amputee, it's as if he had been gagged as well as bound. When I first met the Sierra Leoneans, I kept imagining that the tongue had been cut off along with the hands.

"Think about it," Mirones told me, "the implications for your manhood. Not only can't you care for yourself—you can't touch a woman, your children. Christ, you can't even urinate. It's like castration."

Duret said, "The patient has to mourn this perfect body, to be able to admit afterward that, effectively, 'My body is no longer what it was, but, thanks to the prosthesis, I can do this, do that.'"

One afternoon while I was sitting in an Arimed examination room, I saw Tommy Foday, the driver who had lost both hands, take off his sweatshirt so that his prostheses could be adjusted. In five minutes of intense muscular activity, he dropped his torso as low as it would go, gripped the fabric behind his neck with his hooks, and, after several tries, pulled the sweatshirt over his head.

The Arimed prosthesis has a hard, laminated acrylic-resin socket that conforms to every contour of the stump for the greatest muscular control. It's connected to a steel double hook, or terminal device, on one end, and a nylon harness fits over the shoulders; a cable runs from the harness to the terminal device, and the wearer controls the hook by hunching the shoulders. The first thing Foday had done when he received his prostheses was to go into the bathroom, unzip his fly without assistance, and urinate.

In the lobby on the way out, Foday tried to put on his sunglasses. He had the bridge in the pincer grip of his hook, but the balance was off; the glasses were askew on his face, and one of the hinges kept flopping. Finally, on the fifth or sixth try, he got them on straight.

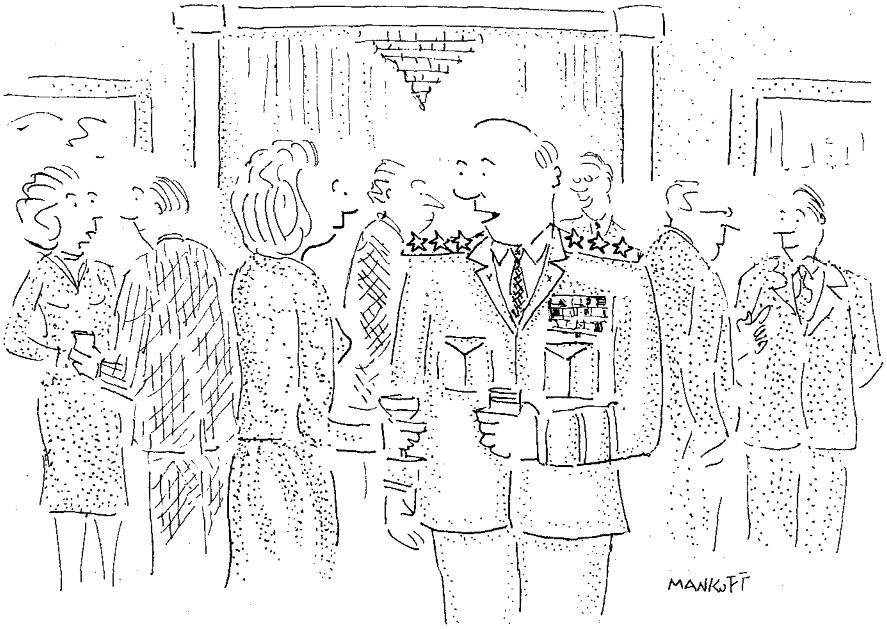
Three months after the children arrived, Mirones's project began falling apart. The heart of the matter was this: What should become of the children? Mirones planned to send them back home after rehabilitation, to show Sierra Leone's other amputees that they could still lead independent lives. He had built room for growth into the prostheses and would send duplicate parts as needed, training one of the adults in maintenance. He would travel there at some unspecified time to expand his work—what he called Stage Two. But for the others involved in the project—especially Joe Mandarino and the Rotarians—it all sounded vague and impractical. Would the children be safe? Would their limbs be stolen? Would they really get the intensive follow-up care that prostheses—especially for children, who have to be refitted every eighteen months or so—require? Would they vanish back into the misery of Sierra Leone?

The amputees wanted to stay. Whenever the children misbehaved, the surest way to get them in line was to say that they'd be sent back to Freetown. Almost all the children had at least one living parent in Sierra Leone, but their parents were subsisting on rations in the amputee camp. The war seemed to be ending, but it had seemed that way before. One of the chaperons told me that the children seldom spoke of missing their parents. When I asked why, she answered, "Here they get everything they need, but there, even if they have parents, if they have no money the father gets angry, the mother gets angry. It's poverty." But they were not in the United States as asylum seekers; they had six-month humanitarian visas, renewable for up to two years. Promises had been made to both governments that the children would return home.

Something else was happening on Staten Island: a group of people in the tight community of the North Shore was falling in love with the children. Someone had to drive them to Our Lady Help of Christians School, where they were enrolled; someone had to give them phone cards so they could call

Freetown. Nancy Passeri, a middle-aged woman with close-cropped hair who is the wife of Staten Island University Hospital's president, acted as a chauffeur on one occasion, and before long she was spending almost every free hour with the children, taking little Mohammed to have the stitches removed from his amputated leg and holding the boy in her arms as he broke into a sweat and screamed and kicked and pleaded, "Auntie Nancy!"

One day, as Passeri and I were driving to the small condominium where the group was housed, she said, "I'm not very into organized religion, but these kids are so profoundly—well, you've met them, you know. I have to believe there's more. They've made me more spiritual." She kept asking herself, "Is this a service or a disservice? How can they be sent back? How is this ever going to work? You show them hope and then you put them back, you show them Heaven and then you take them back to Hell." She concluded that, without losing their connection to home, the children should stay and be adopted. "I would like to go and meet the families," she said. "If I could sit with them and translate with them, and they could feel the love I have for their children, they wouldn't be so afraid."



"Frankly, I'm more concerned with our entrance strategy."

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Joe Mandarino, whom the children call Uncle Joe, is a combative man with salt-and-pepper hair and heavy black eyebrows over fatigued eyes. As I entered the cramped second-floor offices of his printing company one afternoon, he greeted me by saying, "I'm a negative person," and he began to assess Mirones's project. "Had it not been for Matthew, these kids would never have come here—that's the good side," he said. But Mirones had no follow-up plan for the children's return. "I'm Italian—when I feel someone's playing a game, I don't play along. He said, 'I feel the international community will get involved. It will blossom like a flower.' I said, 'Are you crazy? Just giving them a limb isn't enough. You have to give them yourself.' What he hasn't given is himself. His heart's not in it." Mandarino never intended to do more than arrange the children's housing. "But there's a beauty about the people of Sierra Leone that attracts you and catches you like a web. A beauty and a purity and an unconditional love. It's like Adam and Eve. It's like going back in time where the races don't matter. They hug you, they kiss you." He smiled. "If you ever feel a little down on yourself—market's not doing well, your business isn't good—you walk to their house and you feel like a million dollars."

In December, 2000, Mandarino called a meeting on Staten Island between the Rotarians and the Friends of Sierra Leone. "We're going to give them all the advantages in America," Mandarino said. Etta Touré, who had come up from Washington, and the former Peace Corps volunteers countered that separating the children from their families and their culture would only deepen rifts caused by the war. "If you want to send them back," Mandarino told Touré, "take them now, back to D.C. with you. We're done with them." Instead, the Friends of Sierra Leone relented and turned the children's passports over to the Rotarians. Mandarino began applications for political asylum; at the same time, he and Nancy Passeri started looking for families to adopt the children. Mirones's original idea of inspiring large numbers of amputees in Sierra Leone gave way to saving the handful who were here.

"We're looking at the little picture," Mandarino said. "We're concerned not with the country but with a few people. Countries look at big issues that affect their national interest. That's why Sierra Leone never had an impact in this country. They could kill each other from here to eternity and we won't care. Unless a journalist writes a story—then we get angry. For a little while, we have a focus. But now we can't shut it off."

The rush to adoption struck some of the former Peace Corps volunteers as well-meaning American arrogance. Lynne Loomis-Price, who served in a village that has since been obliterated by the war, has daughters the same age as two of the children. "How can you amputate a girl from her mother?" she said. " 'Do you want her to stay or not?' But what a rotten question to put to a woman who's already lost everything. 'We can raise your kids better than you, don't worry.' " No one involved in bringing the amputees from Sierra Leone had thought it through, she said. But Loomis-Price had no solution of her own. She concluded that the children shouldn't be sent back against their will. She said, "I don't know the happy ending here."

In order to strengthen the plea for asylum, the immigration lawyer who took down the children's stories tried to find cause for the cruelty in politics or in ethnicity or in religion. But the violence

"He's not here."

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that the amputees had endured was both meaningless and indelible: the children of Sierra Leone had suffered for no reason at all. Such senselessness evoked a frenzy of emotion and action in the people of Staten Island: they arranged outings, held fund-raisers, and threw a sweet-sixteen party for Mariama, at the Staten Island Hotel with a hundred guests.

The children were being treated by a trauma specialist named Louise Abitbol, and when I went to see her at a child-advocacy center, near the ferry terminal, she described the Staten Islanders' response to the children with the phrase "vicarious trauma." She said, "They've created their own little war zone." With the disputes over immigration and adoption, she continued, "They've taken on all the behaviors of these people." It was disrespectful to disregard the parents in Africa, she said—"very presumptuous to think that they're just going to give up their children." Abitbol credited the Staten Islanders for their devotion but said, "They're in over their heads, as far as I'm concerned. Culturally and politically."

One day at the advocacy center, Abitbol and Passeri were talking to the children about adoption. Each of the kids made up a "wish list" of what would be desirable in adoptive parents. But gradually the children became tense. Fatu, a ten-year-old, muttered, "No more Krio, only English," and in frustration she took a Magic Marker in her prosthetic hand and drew a line through the word "parents." The others did the same. Abitbol substituted "friends" for "parents." Bintu, nine, said, "I feel angry." Damba, eight, said, "I feel sad." In Passeri's car on the way home, the children were uncharacteristically silent. For days, the two women couldn't agree on what had happened. Passeri, who sees the children's future here, thought that they didn't like the word "friends," that they wanted those who adopted them to be "parents"; Abitbol, concerned about cultural sensitivity, thought the opposite. It turned out that the children were angry at Passeri: they had believed that she would adopt them and they would live in her house, and now they realized it wasn't to be.

It was hard to know the truth about the children's inner lives. Their backgrounds and stories were unclear; no one seemed to know whether Bintu's mother was alive, or exactly what had happened to Memuna and Mohammed. "What saved them was the ability to dissociate, to move outside their bodies," Abitbol said. "You see it on their faces, with this blank stare—nobody home."

The condominium where the Sierra Leoneans were living was a drab two-story affair, strewn with schoolbooks. The chaperons and the children lived downstairs, the two men—Muctar Jalloh and Tommy Foday—upstairs. One evening, as West African music played in the upstairs living room and the girls danced across the carpet, Damba talked about her mother, whose left hand had been cut off at the same time as her own. Damba was six when it happened, and in the hospital she asked her mother if her hand would grow back. Even now, Damba said, when she dreams about her mother they both have two hands. "When I wake up I didn't know if I have a hand," she said. "I look to see. But I didn't have my hand." The others chimed in, laughing. Bintu, who lost her leg to a gunshot, dreams of walking freely, and Mariama sees herself cooking and carrying water.

It was the hour for Muslim prayers. Upstairs, Jalloh and Foday laid out a towel in the corner of the room, where they were joined by a fifteen-year-old orphan named Sheku. When Sheku was eleven, his father was burned alive and his mother shot dead before his eyes; then rebels cut off both his hands. He was a late addition to the group: he had originally come over with four men, all double amputees, sponsored by a shopping-mall developer who'd read another *Times* article about amputation. But after receiving prostheses from Mirones the five were sent back to the amputee camp in Freetown. When Nancy Passeri, who fantasizes about whole families immigrating from the camp, learned that a minor had been in the group, she bought Sheku a return ticket. Now, back in this country for the second time, he was getting ready to say his evening prayers on Staten Island.

Jalloh knelt in front, Foday and Sheku behind, facing east. They had taken off their prostheses. Jalloh had learned the Arabic verses in Koranic school, and he recited them in a glottal chant. He brought his left hand to his lips, passed it over his face, and raised it to Heaven;

Foday and Sheku were solemn. The refrigerator in the kitchen was humming, and the men rocked and prayed: "All praise and thanks are to Allah, the Lord of Mankind and all that exists. The most gracious, the most merciful, the only Owner and the only ruling judge of the day of Recompense. You alone we worship, and you alone we ask for help in everything."

Downstairs, the girls were watching a Nigerian video. It was a love story, and they were riveted. When it was over, Damba got up, went to a full-length mirror in the corner of the room, and stared at herself.

No one seemed to know what the children's parents wanted, and I decided to go to Sierra Leone to find out. My travelling companion was Matthew Mirones. He and the Rotarians were no longer speaking. His involvement with the children had waned. They were now just patients coming in every few weeks for follow-up care—with a frequency that made me wonder how his original plan of returning them to Africa could ever have worked. Bringing the children to New York had transformed their lives, but not in the way Mirones had imagined. His project had been wrested away from him, and now he seemed determined to show that he was serious about wanting to help more than just eight people.

Mirones had never been to Africa, let alone to a ruined country like Sierra Leone, which a United Nations' survey of human development had rated the worst place in the world. A ceasefire was holding, and the U.N. had seventeen thousand peacekeepers in the tiny country to oversee disarmament, but Mirones wondered if some rebel would say, "Oh, this is the wise guy who's going to help our people?" He didn't want to come back requiring his own company's services. Two nights before we were to leave New York, he telephoned me, and I thought he was going to back out. But he had just heard that there were Lebanese restaurants in Freetown. "I grew up with these guys on Atlantic Avenue," he said. "We'll have good food!"

Between long ocean beaches and a chain of lovely green hills, Freetown lay in a state of collapse. In African terms, it's an old city, settled at the end of the eighteenth century by freed slaves, and among its more extravagantly decayed buildings are nineteenth-century clapboard houses, the shutters slumping at the windows. It wasn't easy to tell which buildings had fallen into terminal neglect, which had never been finished, and which had been burned by the rebels. The war accelerated a process that had been going on for a long time. Tens of thousands of refugees had poured into the city, and the narrow potholed roads were clogged with vehicles and pedestrians, including the occasional amputee begging. Outside one shop, a sign announced, "Free Haircut for All Amputees."

Sierra Leone's misery has attracted more than a hundred and eighty N.G.O.s, and their four-wheel-drive vehicles seemed to be the only new and functioning things in the landscape. Mirones made the rounds of the groups providing prostheses. An American woman named Kim Kargbo sat down with him in the sweltering conference room of World Hope International. She wore a blue denim jumper embroidered with pink flowers, and had a blond ponytail and the brisk manner of a daughter of missionaries. She had grown up here and was meeting a man whose project she had vehemently opposed. She said that she was shocked to see him.

"We're here on the ground pouring our blood, sweat, and tears in a war-recovery situation," Kargbo said. "You did this as a sort of non-coördinated effort. Those kids were involved in a long-term rehab plan. All of a sudden they're gone, and none of us have even talked to you—that was kind of difficult."

Mirones explained his original idea of having the kids come back here as models.

"And that certainly has merits," Kargbo said. "But one problem is the kids are never coming back. So how does that fit in the mix?" The effect he'd had in Sierra Leone, Kargbo said, was to tear apart families, "which is what the war has been about," and to raise unreasonable hopes among the amputees who were left behind.

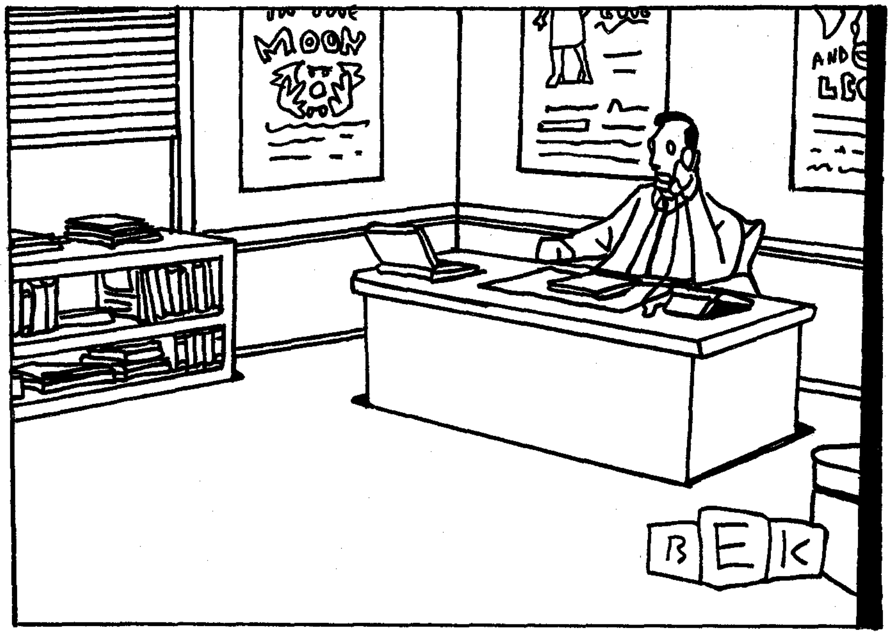
Mirones described how he'd tried to deflate the bubble of miraculous expectations among the kids in New York.

"But you can't burst the bubble," Kargbo told him. "It's too strong."

"I was glad she came clean with me," Mirones said on the way out. "Why beat around the bush?"

I asked if he now had any second thoughts.

"No. Look, you've seen what I've seen. She can talk, but I know our people got better care—medical, orthopedic, prosthetic. Look at this guy." An elderly

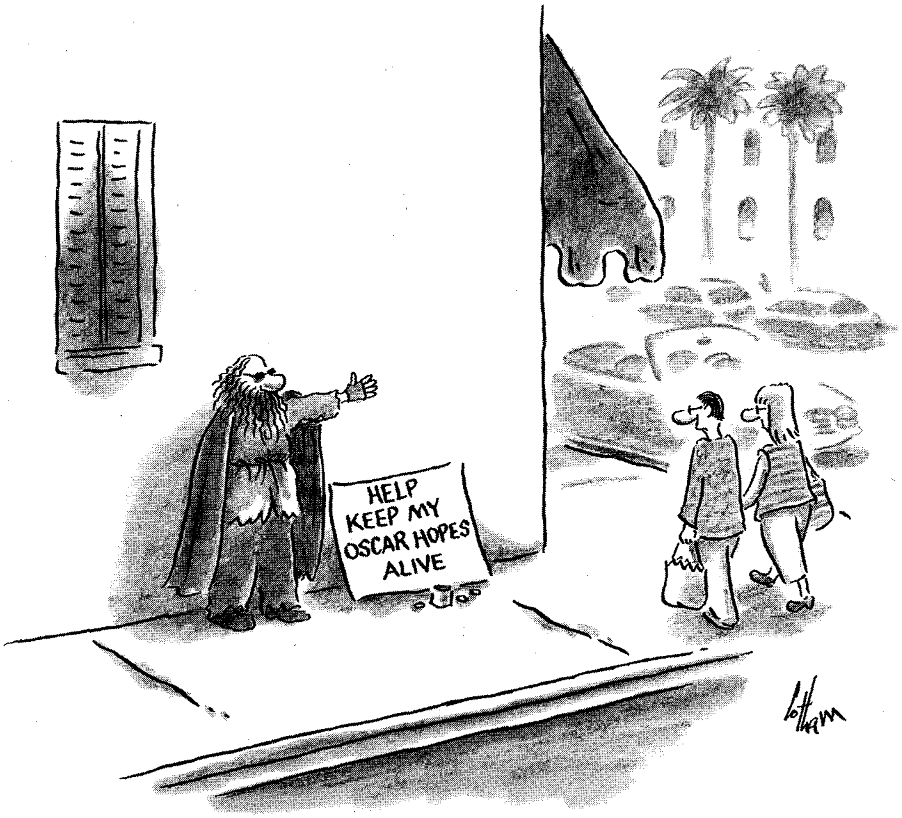


"It's boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy and girl do everything you've seen in every other movie."

man was sitting by the security gate with what looked like a boxing glove attached to metal rods that were strapped around his forearm without a socket. "Why should he have to wear a fucking arm like that?"

As we drove around the city, Mirones's mood rose and fell. "One minute I'm thinking, There's nothing I can do, it's out of my hands, and the next I'm thinking, How can we set up some kind of commissary to feed them?" The prosthetics labs were rudimentary by his standards, and they gave him an impression of profound idleness. Everywhere, people were sitting around with nothing to do, dozens of amputees were wearing no prostheses, and none of it made any sense. "That little girl needs a wheelchair," he muttered as we passed a child, crippled from polio in both legs, lurching along the road without crutches. "Where's the sense of urgency?" he kept asking. "I mean, get the show on the road, get on the phone, make a couple of calls, let's go!" The next minute, he would check himself: "Then again, we don't know all the circumstances, the obstacles."

The amputee camp on the western end of Freetown is a warren of plastic tents housing about three hundred amputees and twelve hundred relatives. There's a satellite dish by the entrance. Mirones's arrival drew a large group, who passed around my photographs of the children and exclaimed over how much weight they'd gained. As we walked up a dirt road toward the camp's prosthetics lab, a man who was missing a hand shyly approached and said that he wondered if by some chance he would be the next one to be taken away. Mirones wasn't the only foreigner to have removed people from the camp. Groups with names like Feed My Lambs International and Christ End Timer Movement were regularly spiriting away amputees from under the noses of the N.G.O.s that were supposedly providing prosthetics and therapy. Outsiders described the camp as "the national holocaust museum" and "a freak show" that ought to be shut down, but no one seemed prepared to take that step. The camp received attention, money, and consignments of goods that benefitted the government, the N.G.O.s, and the amputees. It attracted visitors like Madeleine Albright, Kofi Annan, and Matthew Mirones. A Dutch physical therapist who had worked in Sierra Leone sixteen years ago told me that he recognized a man in the camp who had lost part of his leg to diabetes long ago and was now presenting himself as an atrocity victim.



Another group, known as the War Wounded, had originally been sheltered with the amputees, but fights kept breaking out between the two groups over donations that were meant for amputees, and the War Wounded were moved to a camp about ten miles outside town. There they showed me deep machete gashes, bullet wounds in the face, and terrible burns. Two women said that they'd been shot in the vagina. A botched amputation had cost a man the use of both hands. But the War Wounded felt ignored by the world and envious of the amputees, who ranked higher on the scale of suffering. A joke was making the rounds in Freetown about how many fingers one would be willing to lose in order to go to America.

A woman and her husband, who was missing one arm and both ears, claimed a family relationship with Memuna, the poster child, but their claim was false. They said that a twelve-year-old rebel had chopped off the little girl's arm, but I discovered that it had been surgically amputated after being infected with fragments from the bullet that had killed her grandmother. One of the children on Staten Island had told me that she'd seen both her parents shot to death; I learned in Africa that her father had died of natural causes and her mother was still alive. The logic of survival, the need to be noticed, drove people to exaggerate already unspeakable horrors. The camp mocked Mirones's vision of self-sufficient amputees. I asked a double amputee who had received prostheses in New York and then been sent back why so few people in the camp wore their arms. "They want to win sympathy," he said. "In case someone like you comes to the camp." Amputation had given people an "edge," to use Corinne Dufka's word. Having lost everything else, the children's families were making what they could of it.

There is no Krio word for "adoption." In Sierra Leone, the concept doesn't exist. (The only people who used the word "adoption" were the rebels, insisting that they never abducted the boys and girls who became soldiers and servants.) But use of the Krio word *men*, meaning "to care for," is extremely widespread, as is the practice: a woman other than the biological parent will bring up a child because the parents can't, or because she is childless, or simply because she likes the child. Unlike adoption, there is no loss of legal rights, and it's expected that upon reaching adulthood the child will help support the biological parents. Of the children on Staten Island, three had been cared for by adults who were not their biological parents, and none lived with both parents. The families in the camp seemed to understand that a similar arrangement had been made for their children in America.

Each child had recorded a tape for her family. Fatu made one for her aging aunt: "I know very well that you're all suffering there. I want you to know I won't forget you. They're teaching us to cook. We go to church on Sunday. For now I can only send pictures. You need to see how happy I am. I've even forgotten that they amputated my hand. I can even write with the hand that was chopped off. That is the biggest thing that has happened to me. So I feel like a normal kid."

None of the families wanted the children to return. Bintu's aunt, who called herself the mother, said that the night after the girl went away she had a dream so frightening that it woke her up: Bintu was back, hobbling on her crutch. "You didn't go to America?" her aunt cried. "What happened?"

Damba's uncle, who called himself the father, said, "The problem that she had, the amputation, is a blessing in disguise. It was the will of God and the price she had to pay to go to America."

I tried to explain adoption in terms of the concrete rights that the parents would lose. Damba's mother, painfully thin from tuberculosis, began stroking her lip and then her forehead with her one hand, anxiety filling her eyes. Finally, the uncle, a small man in an embroidered Muslim gown and cap, spoke up. "I can't accept that, we don't do that," he said. "In our culture, when you get children the point is for us to prosper when she grows up. If you want to help us, *men* the child. Good. But, if you want to take custody, that's out of the question."

Mariama's mother said, "I would prefer she lives there and comes to visit once in a while. I will never accept her being adopted, because she's my daughter and we were very close. I can't imagine that. My daughter will never accept it, either."

One by one, I spoke with each family, and they all said no.

When I thought about it later, it was difficult to know whether their fear was losing the child or losing the benefits. Perhaps one was inextricable from the other. What seemed clear was that the families had already made enough sacrifices. The children on Staten Island were all they had left.

Erik Duret, the French psychologist in Freetown, said of the children's situation, "For me, that's the worst of all—its absolute uprooting." The war, he said, was above all a story of broken bonds, which could be repaired only within the family, the community, the society. "These people, after the excitement of the beginning, after six months, a year, two years, are going to start asking themselves, 'What's become of my family? What's happening over there? Who am I?' "

I didn't disagree. But it occurred to me that the people who wanted the children sent back to Sierra Leone didn't have to live there. Sierra Leoneans themselves readily grasped the measures that the families had taken and the decision they had made.

One night at the hotel bar, Mirones said, "The easiest piece of the puzzle is the device. Considering all the other insurmountable obstacles they have to contend with, it seems that having an inferior prosthesis just adds to it. It's not brain surgery. It's pretty straightforward." He set down his Scotch. "Where do I fall on this now? Where do I put my emphasis? What do I advocate? Do I advocate supporting the mechanism that's in place? Come up with a new one? Who's got the time for that? Do I try to improve what they're doing? It's not political, technical, bureaucratic. It's a man-to-man, human-to-human issue. The hard part is to mobilize people to show the same passion they exhibited back home for the people here."

Mirones looked discouraged and slightly frantic. He had wanted to help people on a larger scale than the Rotarians envisioned, and in Sierra Leone itself; but a destroyed African country wasn't going to lend itself easily to the practical energies of a Brooklyn businessman. He had run up against the limits here: the very qualities that had worked so well back in New York—his single-mindedness, his refusal, as he often said, to "dwell on things" to the extent that action became impossible—left him at a loss about how to proceed in Freetown, among people who needed far more than limbs.

"Imagine not having a pair of hands!" he suddenly exclaimed. "It's part of what separates us from the animal kingdom, it's this beautiful ability to be dextrous and capable with the hands. And you lose that ability . . ." He stared at me, his mouth pulled down, his hands held out before him.

After a week in Africa, Mirones went home. A month later, in his Brooklyn office, he told me that he was eager to return and set up a facility to bring to Sierra Leone the kind of first-rate prosthetic care that the people there deserve. But, as it turned out, that week in Freetown marked the end of his project; the amputees living new lives in America mark the extent of his contribution. They have all received political asylum, and though the families in the camp still have not given written consent for adoption, three of the children are now living with couples around the country, who are seeking legal guardianship, and Joe Mandarino and Nancy Passeri are looking for homes for the others. Last August, Sheku, the orphaned teen-age boy, flew to Montana to meet a ranching couple who were interested in adopting some of the children. On the long drive from Billings to the ranch, he told me later, "It was dark, with mountains. Guess what? It give me the flashback. I remember when the men chop off my hands. I start suffering like I was a little boy. So I didn't like it." Sheku decided that a ranch in Montana would not be the best place for the children, who, more than two years after coming to the United States, were still living on Staten Island and awaiting new parents.

The man who brought them here no longer makes limbs. Last year, in a special election, Matthew Mirones ran as a Republican for an open seat in the New York State Assembly, and now serves his Staten Island constituents in Albany. ♦

PROFILES

FLYING INTO THE LIGHT

How James Turrell turned a crater into his canvas.

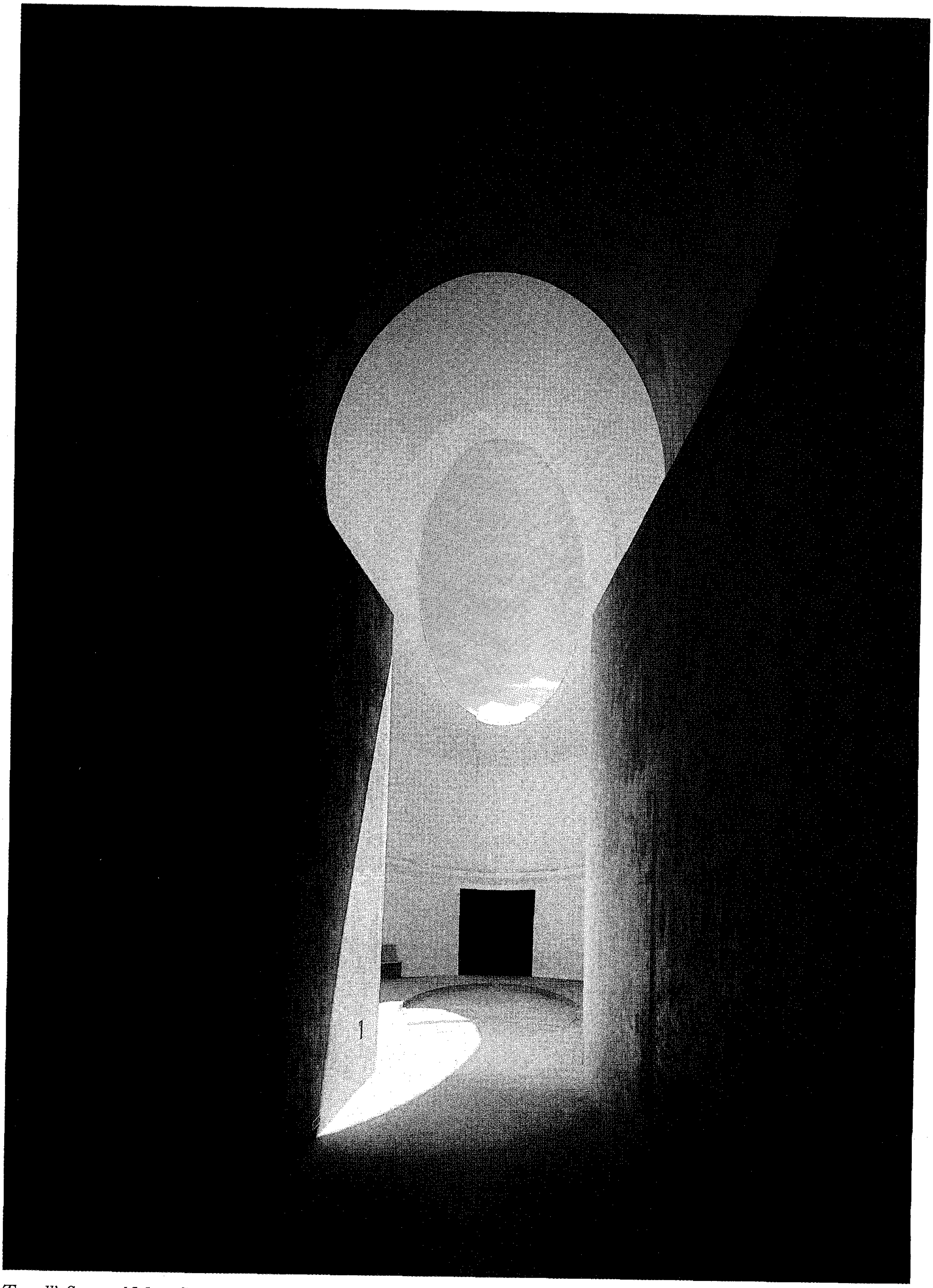
BY CALVIN TOMKINS

For sheer aesthetic tenacity, nothing beats the saga of James Turrell and the Roden Crater. Since 1974, Turrell's working life has centered on the effort to turn an extinct volcano on the western edge of the Painted Desert, in northern Arizona, into a naked-eye observatory for celestial events. Turrell is an artist whose medium is light. His work is not about light, or a record of light; it *is* light—the physical presence of light made manifest in sensory form. At the crater, he has built nine underground chambers and one huge outdoor space (the crater's bowl) "to capture and apprehend light" from the sun and the moon and the stars—and also to demonstrate how we create and form our perceptions of the visible world. After years of struggling just to hold on to the land and keep the project going, Turrell has received substantial funding from two private foundations in the last four years. The first phase of construction is virtually complete as a result, but a great deal remains to be done, and the future of the crater, whose total cost will probably exceed twenty million dollars, is far from assured. As obsessions go, this one could outlive Turrell.

At the wheel of his dark-blue diesel pickup, careering down a dirt road and accelerating around curves to minimize vibration from the washboard surface, the artist manages to look both rugged and distinguished. Turrell, who is fifty-nine, is a big man, big in the shoulders and chest, and, these days, in the middle as well. He wears jeans and cowboy boots, and a made-to-order shirt of pin-striped blue gabardine, with buffalo nickels for buttons. His hair is white, and so is his full beard and flowing mustache. A mountainous serenity envelops him as he sits behind the wheel, steering with one hand and pointing out things with the other as we hurtle past. "There you see some first-time mothers with their calves," he says, waving at two dozen small and smaller dark-brown cows. "The heifers will have theirs a little later." Turrell became a cattle rancher sixteen years ago, so that he could get a bank loan on his land—banks don't lend money to develop craters as art works. His ranch, Walking Cane, now has just under a thousand head of cattle on a hundred and fifty-six square miles of land, about half of which he owns outright. (He leases grazing rights to the rest.) "It's paid off," he says. "Agriculture is actually subsidizing art. I'm not sure if it's harder making a living as a rancher or an artist, but I think people behave better in ranching."

The crater is about half an hour's drive from Turrell's modest ranch house and studio, which makes it an hour from Flagstaff. The landscape changes dramatically as the altitude drops, from Flagstaff's seven thousand feet to five thousand at the crater. Ponderosa pines and aspens give way to piñon and juniper, and now we are barrelling along through arid grasslands on the eastern edge of the San Francisco volcanic plateau. Rounded cinder cones loom on all sides, some much bigger than Roden. "That's Saddle Crater," Turrell says, "the one that looks like a shark took a bite out of it. There's one called Merrill Crater, after a member of the family that made Merrill Lynch, although I think it should be after another member, James Merrill, an amazing poet." A little farther along, he points out a tiny log house, which he built in the early eighties and lived in for nineteen months, studying the crater and the light and "trying to understand what happens throughout the year." When Roden Crater comes into view a few minutes later, it is instantly clear why he chose it: a symmetrical, black-and-red cone that's all by itself in the landscape, with an unobstructed horizon. "There were four parts to its explosive cycle," Turrell explains, "and you're looking at two of them. The black crater was first. The red crater blew out of it later. That was three hundred and eighty-nine thousand years ago. It's kind of a young crater, modest in scale, but very handsome. We're coming to a place here where the two of them look almost like that painting by Man Ray, of lips in the sky. Do you see it?" I see it. Northern Arizona is irresistibly pictorial. The red-rock country around Sedona, sixty miles to the south, inspired not only John Ford but Max Ernst, who lived there for a while in the nineteen-forties. The silhouetted buttes in the backgrounds of Krazy Kat comics were drawn mostly from life by George Herriman, who spent a lot of time in Flagstaff.

Driving slowly now, Turrell navigates the winding dirt road up Roden Crater. It's four-thirty in the afternoon, and the work crew has just knocked off for the day. (Navajos compose a large portion of the construction crew on the crater; their lands lie to the east.) Halfway up, he stops to show me the nearly finished guest lodge. It is built right into the black cinder slope, an elegantly spare concrete bunker with floor-to-ceiling windows facing south across the valley. Turrell designed every facet and detail, including the furniture, which is being made. There is a suavely efficient kitchen, and four bedrooms with private baths. Two other lodges are planned, elsewhere on the crater. All three together will accommodate at least twenty overnight visitors at a time. Since many of the celestial events to be viewed involve the night sky, serious visitors will want to sleep over; the best viewing hours are from sunset to midnight, and from just before dawn to a little after sunrise. If the immediate funding comes through



Turrell's Sun and Moon Space, in Roden Crater, Arizona, works like a pinhole camera. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

"Well, Mr. Goddam Fancy-Pants Small-Town-Exposé hot shot! What makes you think we don't all have lusty, kiss-and-tell memoirs boiling away inside us?"

• •

as planned, Turrell thinks he can finish Phase I of his construction plan in a year and a half. It will take at least four more years to carry out Phases II and III.

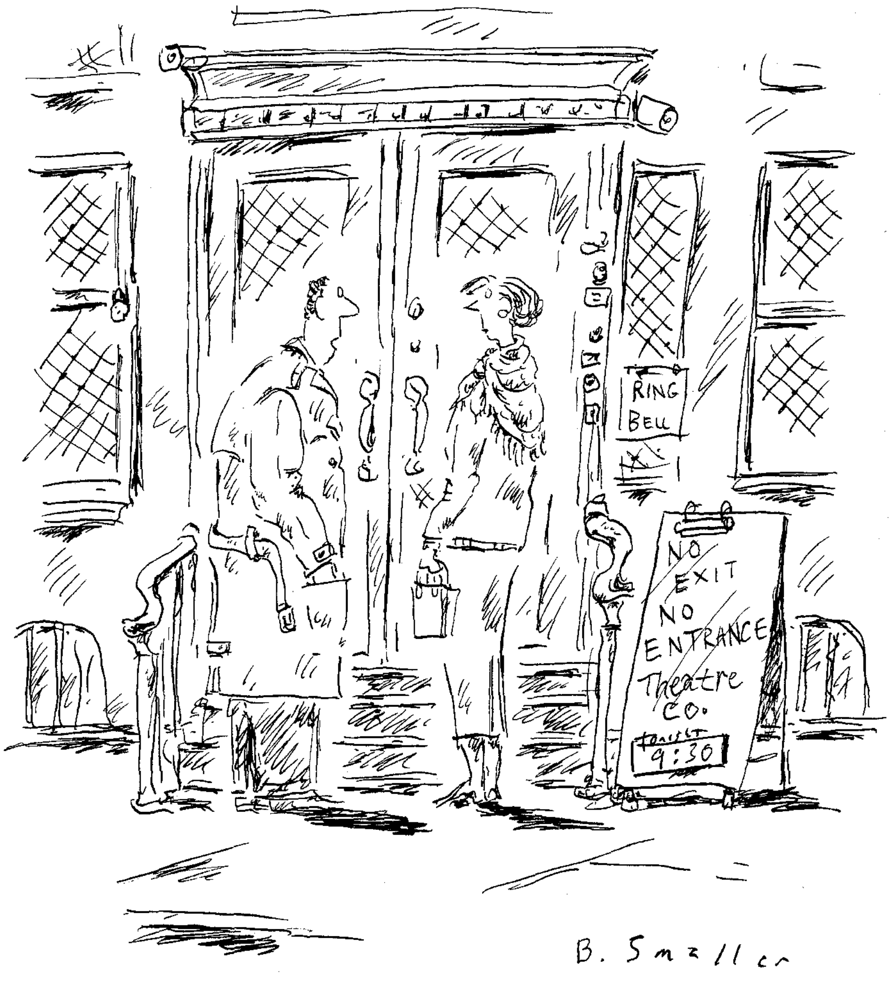
About three-quarters of the way up the slope, Turrell parks his truck and heads toward what is clearly a temporary entrance to the crater's interior. We enter a high-ceilinged room called the Sun and Moon Space, which has a seventeen-foot-tall white stone monolith in its center. On the far side of the monolith there is an upward-sloping tunnel oriented to the southwest, to receive the moon at its southernmost apogee. Another tunnel, scheduled for construction during Phase II, is oriented to the northeast, to receive the rising sun. Every year, at the solstice, the sun will line up precisely with its opening and imprint its image on the monolith. Once every 18.6 years, the moon will register a detailed reverse image of itself on the monolith's other side. The Sun and Moon Space functions like a pinhole camera. It also suggests ancient rituals, of which Turrell is keenly aware. His thinking has been shaped by visits to Newgrange, in Ireland, Abu Simbel, in Egypt, and other sites where openings cut into the rock were aligned so that sunlight could penetrate to the deep interior at certain times of the year.

We start walking up the completed tunnel, which is shaped like a keyhole. It is nine feet high and eight feet wide, with an arched ceiling. At the far end, nearly nine hundred feet away, daylight is visible through a round opening. The floor is rough concrete, with small lights placed about eight feet apart on either side. Our voices reverberate and echo in the tunnel, except at certain intervals, or "nodes," as Turrell calls them, where the sound goes dead. "The tunnel is tuned like a flute," Turrell says. "I treat sound and light very similarly. I learned a long time ago that when you work with light, and the surfaces are hard, either you pay attention to the sound or it's just going to be chaos."

As we near the tunnel's end, what had looked from below like a round window is revealed as an oculus in the ceiling of a large, elliptical room called the East Portal. Turrell has made many rooms like this during his career, in many parts of the world. He calls them skyspaces, and they are designed to turn the sky's changing light into a physical presence, like a membrane that viewers feel they could touch. There is a skyspace at P.S. 1, the contemporary-art museum in Long Island City, which you can see at dusk, if it doesn't rain or snow. A panel in the ceiling there slides back, and as you sit quietly under the opening a rectangle of sky changes from deep cerulean blue to subtly darkening shades of purple which seem increasingly tangible as they verge into soft, velvety black. "The big thing about a skyspace," Turrell says, "is that the sky is no longer 'out there.' It's brought down into our territory." Sandstone-faced benches line the walls on either side of the East Portal. A recessed ellipse in the middle of the floor, directly under the opening, will be filled with white sand to filter rainwater into hidden drains, and at night, according to Turrell, the sand will reflect the stars. "Starlight itself is very beautiful," he says. "You are going to be able to gather starlight that is over two billion years old, older than our solar system. There will be fresh light from the sun, eight and a half minutes old, and ancient light that's shifted toward the red, with its own character and feeling. You'll be able to see your shadow from the light of Venus alone—I've made a space for this." (Designed a space, he means; the North Space is scheduled for excavation and construction during Phase III.) The difference between night-sky viewing at Roden Crater and at P.S. 1 or anywhere else is that there won't be any man-made interference. In 1997, Turrell persuaded the authorities of Coconino County to pass a "dark sky" ordinance, ruling out any upwarddirected lighting, commercial or domestic, within thirty-five miles of Roden Crater. He also won permission to construct a perilously steep flight of bronze stairs from the floor of the East Portal to the elliptical oculus, so that intrepid viewers could (theoretically, at least) walk up and out into the open-air bowl of the crater. Local ordinances would have required handrails, but Turrell, who knew that handrails would destroy the sight lines, pointed out that in nearby Hopi kivas, which were in use before Europeans discovered this continent, elderly men still walk down near-vertical ladders carrying snakes in either hand. Rather than waiving regulations that would have applied to many other aspects of the crater, Coconino's farsighted building officials amended the building code to allow for a new category, called "land art." "Some amazing people around here," as Turrell puts it. "They really went to bat for me."

Two winding corridors lead off from the East Portal. One goes to the Crater's Eye, a skyspace with a circular oculus. The other leads up and out to the bowl itself, an immense space where bulldozers have moved more than a million cubic yards of rock and earth to shape a graceful oval whose rim is the same height all around. At the bowl's center, four massive, somewhat Pharaonic-looking limestone platforms surround the opening to the Crater's Eye. I do as Turrell directs, and lie down on one of these, on my back. The platform inclines so that my head is lower than my feet. All I can see is sky, more sky than I've ever seen in my life. It's an intensely blue, hemispherical dome, as enclosing and nearly as intimate as the sky in Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel. What I'm experiencing is the perceptual phenomenon called celestial vaulting. We can get something like the same sensation by standing in an open field, but at a certain distance above the ground it becomes much more intense, overwhelmingly intense, in fact, and extraordinarily beautiful. Turrell can't really explain why we see it this way. He tells me that it has something to do with our yearning for "closure"—for closed sets, finite dimensions, a human scale. What he was looking for when he discovered Roden Crater, back in 1974, was a place to make the experience of celestial vaulting available to the rest of us. Turrell isn't interested in giving people his interpretation of natural events—he wants us to experience them firsthand. "My art," he says, "is about your seeing."

A bit disoriented from all that sky, I follow Turrell as he leads the way up the fairly steep slope of the bowl. The wind is blowing hard up here, making it difficult to hear him. I am astonished to see a few tiny green plants in the hostile red cinders underfoot, clinging on for dear life; eventually, the bowl will be blanketed in native black grama and Indian rice grasses and wildflowers. As we reach the rim, Turrell points out how, from this height, the surrounding landscape appears to curve up toward the sky, in a sort of reverse vaulting. Airplane pilots know about this—Turrell first read about it in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's "Wind, Sand, and Stars" when he was a teen-ager, before he became an avid flier himself. (He got his student pilot's license when he was sixteen, and he figures that he has logged more than six and a half years of his life in the air.) We come down out of the wind, and reënter the long, echoing tunnel. "The idea that we do a large part of forming our reality—that's something people are not too aware of," he says. "We actually give the sky its color as well as its shape. You go into a skyspace, and you see that the sky is a certain color, but then if you walk outside you can see that it's not a color. I can change the color of the sky by changing the context of vision—it's the same effect as those perceptual tests where they show you a blue spot on a green field, and the same blue spot on a red field, and you see the spots as different colors. It's what's behind the eye that forms this reality we create. I recently did a lighting job for the Roman aqueduct in Nîmes, and at night there you can now see green sky, red sky, blue sky between the arches. We like to think that this is the rational world we're receiving through our senses, but



"How come there's no feel-good performance art?"

that isn't the way it works. We form our reality. All of the work I do is gentle reminders of how we do that."

Turrell's mother and grandmother were Quakers. When he was seven or eight, the youngest of three children growing up in Pasadena, he remembers his grandmother telling him what to do at a Quaker meeting: "Go inside and greet the light." He knew this meant the invisible inner light, but even then he was fascinated by light's physical presence. As a child, he laboriously pricked holes in the blackout curtains in his bedroom, to simulate the stars and constellations during the daytime. (The curtains had been installed following an air-raid scare in 1942, the year before he was born.) Turrell stopped going to Quaker meetings when he was in his teens. Two years ago, however, he designed a Quaker meetinghouse in Houston, and since then he has been going to meetings and referring to himself as an "un-lapsed" Quaker. The house in Houston is a simple, beautifully proportioned rectangular structure with a skyspace, where inner and outer light coexist in quiet harmony.

His father was an aeronautical engineer who ran the technical school at Pasadena Junior College. He died when Turrell was ten, and not long afterward Turrell's mother, who had trained as a medical doctor but never practiced, joined the Peace Corps and went off to teach zoology in Nyasaland (now called Malawi). An independent child with a strong scientific bent, young Turrell was an Eagle Scout, an honor student in high school, the president of his class, and Pasadena "boy of the year" in 1960. But he didn't graduate with his class in 1961. The year before, he had volunteered for the draft as a conscientious objector (true to his Quaker heritage) but was willing to serve in other ways. His alternative service, as it turned out, was as a pilot with an air-transport agency that worked with the C.I.A. For much of 1960 and 1961—or so it has been reported—Turrell flew small planes into Tibet and brought out Buddhist monks who had been involved in the revolt against China's puppet regime. Turrell has never talked about the experience, and he won't talk about it today; some of his old friends find the story hard to believe. "I'd just rather leave those things out," he said, when I asked.

In the fall of 1961, he entered Pomona College, in Claremont, California, where his classmate Jane Livingston remembers him changing from an eager kid into a longhaired hippie. "He was very serene," according to Kate Ganz, another classmate. "All of us were so full of angst, but Jim just sort of floated amongst us. He was friendly, sweet, and warm." He majored jointly in mathematics and perceptual psychology, and he took a lot of art courses—both art history and studio art. Pomona had a first-rate art department—James Demetrion and Bates Lowry, who went on to become museum directors, were both on the faculty—and Turrell, whose studies in perceptual psychology emphasized optics and visual phenomena, found himself more and more interested in making art. After graduating from Pomona, he decided to continue his art studies at the University of California at Irvine. Turrell's main interest then was in painting. He had been struck at Pomona by the work of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, whose canvases seemed to generate a kind of inner light, but even then it sometimes occurred to him that instead of making art that contained light he could work with light itself. Turrell's first light pieces, which he made at Irvine, used flammable gases to create flat flames. "I had trouble controlling them," he said, but "the flames were tremendously beautiful and exciting."

Turrell's principal teacher in graduate school was John Coplans, who taught art history and ran the university's art gallery. An artist himself, and a former pilot in the Royal Air Force, Coplans thought Turrell was an exceptionally bright student with very little knowledge of modern art, so he had him spend most of his time reading books and periodicals in Coplans's private art library. One day, while reading an essay by the art historian Michael Fried, Turrell suddenly shouted, "That's it! I've got it!" His eureka moment was triggered by a disparaging comment of Fried's about the work of Donald Judd and other minimal artists—that their impersonal, machine-made sculptures had the look of images from projected slides.

THE BALL

As long as nothing can be known for sure
(no signals have been picked up yet),

as long as Earth is still unlike
the nearer and more distant planets,

as long as there's neither hide nor hair
of other grasses graced by other winds,
of other treetops bearing other crowns,
other animals as well-grounded as our own,

as long as only the local echo
has been known to speak in syllables,

as long as we still haven't heard word
of better or worse mozarts,
platos, edisons somewhere,

as long as our inhuman crimes
are still committed only between humans,

as long as our kindness
is still incomparable,
peerless even in its imperfection,

as long as our heads packed with illusions
still pass for the only heads so packed,

as long as the roofs of our mouths alone
still raise voices to high heavens—

let's act like very special guests of honor
at the district-firemen's ball,
dance to the beat of the local oompah band,
and pretend that it's the ball
to end all balls.

I can't speak for others—
for me this is
misery and happiness enough:

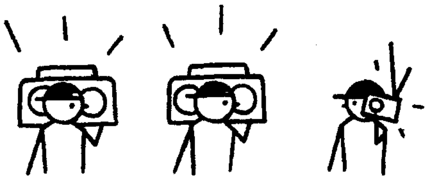
just this sleepy backwater
where even the stars have time to burn
while winking at us
unintentionally.

—*Wislawa Szymborska*

(*Translated, from the Polish, by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh.*)

Turrell was no fan of slide lectures. It bothered him that every projected image—whether it was the Mona Lisa or a monumental abstraction by Barnett Newman—came out the same size on the screen, and quite often with a luminosity that was missing in the original. And lately his attention had been wandering more and more from the screen to the beam of light itself, with its dust motes and its smoky, flickering colors. Fried's comment gave him the idea for a light piece, which he worked out during the next few weeks and installed, with Coplans's encouragement, in the Irvine art gallery. Using a blank slide in a high-intensity projector mounted near the ceiling, he directed a beam of light across one corner of the room, where it formed what appeared to be a floating, three-dimensional white rectangle. This was something remarkable, Coplans remembers thinking, when he saw the piece. "I told him, 'You don't need us. Go be an artist.' " Turrell left Irvine after one semester, but not because of what Coplans had said. He was arrested in 1966, in a sting operation by the F.B.I., for counselling potential draftees on how to avoid going to Vietnam. This is another phase of his life that he's reluctant to discuss, except to say that "sometimes you can be so naïve as to think that your own self-righteousness will carry the day."

In 1967, after serving some time in jail, Turrell moved back to Los Angeles. He had a little money saved up, which he used to take a lease on the old Mendota Hotel, a small, derelict building in what was then a sort of slum, the Ocean Park section of Los Angeles, where Richard Diebenkorn and a number of other artists had studios. Setting aside two rooms in front, on the street, for his studio, Turrell proceeded to seal them off from the outside world, blocking out the windows and painting the walls, floors, and ceilings a uniform white. Then he made some carefully calibrated openings that allowed light to enter the rooms under controlled conditions. In the daytime, shafts of sunlight would move slowly across a section of wall or floor. At night, the headlights of passing cars created moving patterns. He experimented with variations on the cross-corner projection he had made at Irvine, and with more complex projections of colored light on flat walls. Coplans exhibited several of these works in 1967 at the Pasadena Art Museum, where he had become chief curator—it was Turrell's first one-man show—and he published his catalogue essay on them in the influential art magazine *Artforum*, of which he was the West Coast editor. Turrell was becoming known in the Los Angeles art community as a slightly mysterious character who occasionally invited people to the Mendota to see his work, but who wasn't interested in selling it. He even turned down the Los Angeles County Museum, which wanted to buy some of his drawings.



Turrell supported himself by rebuilding old cars—he is an ace mechanic—and by flying airplanes. In 1969, he bought his first plane, a single-engine Helio Courier. He flew for the Neptune Society (aerial burials) and as a crop duster, until Sam Francis, an artist who had flown P-38s in the Second World War, got him a better job, delivering mail to little towns up and down the San Joaquin Valley. In the early nineteen-seventies, Turrell and three others started a small company to rebuild antique airplanes, something he loves doing, and has continued to do, on his own, to this day.

In the sixties, you kept hearing that Los Angeles was about to become a major art center. A gifted younger generation of artists (including Ed Ruscha, Billy Al Bengston, Robert Irwin, Ed Kienholz, and about a dozen others) had emerged, and several new galleries and two museums seemed eager to support their work. California minimalism, with its bright colors and hand-polished surfaces, was putting a sunnier spin on the sombre industrial artifacts of Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and their minimalist peers in New York. The California light-and-space artists, on the other hand, seemed indigenous to the West Coast. The main practitioners of light-and-space art—Irwin, Turrell, Douglas Wheeler, and Maria Nordman—never functioned as a group, and didn't agree on much of anything. What they did share, more or less, was an interest in perception—how we see what we see—and also a high-minded disdain for the commercial side of artmaking. A lot of artists felt this way in the sixties. Michael Heizer and Walter De Maria went into the desert and wrestled with raw nature, shaping it into forms that very few people ever saw. Robert Smithson moved tons of rocks and earth to build his "Spiral Jetty," at the northern end of the Great Salt Lake, whose waters soon rose to make it invisible. Of course, these so-called "earth artists" often had wealthy patrons backing them, and they showed (and sold) drawings and photographic blowups of their work in New York art galleries. To function outside the system seemed to require some help from the system. A recognition of this dilemma may have had some bearing on Turrell's sudden decision to withdraw, in 1969, from an intense, year-and-a-half-long collaboration with Robert Irwin. The two artists had been working together on a project sponsored by the Los Angeles County Museum's Art and Technology program, which paired artists with scientists to explore areas of mutual interest. Turrell and Irwin were paired with Edward Wortz, a physiological psychologist who was also involved with training astronauts for space travel. They experimented with sensory deprivation in soundproof chambers, and also with ganzfelds—controlled environments filled with an undifferentiated, homogeneous light that removes all visual clues to where you are—and until Turrell's defection all three of them were excited and stimulated by the collaboration. "At one point, Jim just disappeared," according to Irwin. "Didn't say goodbye, didn't even hint." Neither he nor Wortz, he said, was ever able to figure out why. Turrell told me, "What happened there, to be frank, was that my situation became difficult. Irwin had a New York gallery, so if he got ideas they could immediately come to the marketplace. I didn't have a gallery. For my own protection, I thought it was best for me to withdraw."

Yet it was Irwin who introduced Turrell to Arne Glimcher, the director of the Pace gallery in New York, where he showed. Glimcher visited Turrell's studio in 1968, and offered him a show the following year, advancing him the money to make ten new works for it. Turrell made the works but decided that he didn't want to have them in a gallery. (He paid back the advance.) Turrell preferred to keep on transforming rooms in the Mendota Hotel. He made dreamlike spaces divided by walls of colored light that looked solid until you came close to them. He made ganzfelds in which the viewer lost all sense of dimension. Turrell cut his first skyspace in the roof of the Mendota Hotel. His landlord found out and made him repair the damage, but Count Panza di Biumo, an adventurous Italian art collector who visited the Mendota in 1972, commissioned Turrell to do a skyspace and several other works at his palazzo in Varese. This was Turrell's first commission, completed in 1974. That same year, a group of Hollywood investors bought up his entire block in Ocean Park, forcing Turrell and several other artists, including Sam Francis and Richard Diebenkorn, to find new studios.

"I chose that moment as an opportunity to do what I really wanted, which was to take art into nature," Turrell told me. For the next seven months, using the money from a fortuitous Guggenheim Foundation grant, he flew his Helio Courier from the Canadian border to Mexico and from the Rockies to the Pacific, looking for a site. What he wanted was a truncated cone, a mastaba-shaped formation that rose from six hundred to a thousand feet above a flat plain—high enough to give the experience of celestial vaulting. He would use it the way he had used the Mendota Hotel, carving out tunnels and light-sensing chambers, isolating and channelling particular kinds of natural light. He was in the air for something like seven hundred hours in all; at night he unrolled his sleeping bag under the wing of the plane. Roden Crater, when he found it, was not only the obvious choice; it was familiar territory—Turrell and his parents had camped at nearby Sunset Crater National Monument when he was a child. Although it took him three years to talk the owner into selling him the land ("Son, I don't sell land; I buy land," said Robert Chambers, whose twenty-three-thousand-acre ranch included the crater), Turrell

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POSTSCRIPT

MODEL LIFE

Herb Ritts, who died suddenly last month, at the age of fifty, grew famous for photographing the famous (and notorious for pairing strong, nude men in tender embraces). He made his subjects look vulnerable, sensual, and mythic all at once: the beauty after brain surgery (Elizabeth Taylor); the prankish rapper grabbing his Calvin Kleins (Mark Wahlberg); the grunge widow baring her implant scar (Courtney Love). He liked dramatic natural light, big open spaces, and lots of skin—sweating, mud-caked, muscular, wet—and he had a gift for capturing the naked and the nearly so in their wittiest mood.

Ritts grew up in Brentwood, California, unintimidated by Hollywood celebrity. (His next-door neighbor, Steve McQueen, babysat occasionally, if you can call riding motorcycles in the desert babysitting.) But he only lucked into photography: in 1978, he and an actor friend were killing time in a garage and Ritts, who'd been fooling with a camera in his off hours, shot a few rolls of his friend behind a Buick LeSabre. A year later, that first subject, Richard Gere, hit the big time; the garage session wound up in national magazines; and Ritts's hobby turned into an enterprise that landed his work on Times Square billboards, museum walls, and framed posters in gay households everywhere.

Though his projects and his crew got bigger, Ritts never wholly abandoned the spirit of that first, private shoot. In "Vladimir I, Hollywood, 1990," a coal miner turned circus aerialist poses in a hairnet and, as Ritts said, "more makeup than Cher." Despite the artifice, Ritts caught him in a moment like Gere's, both casual and masculine. "He was putting a white powder on his body and smoking his cigarette—I snapped," Ritts said. "Someone as fantastic as Vladimir doesn't happen every day."

—*Kevin Conley*

immediately started to work on his grand design.

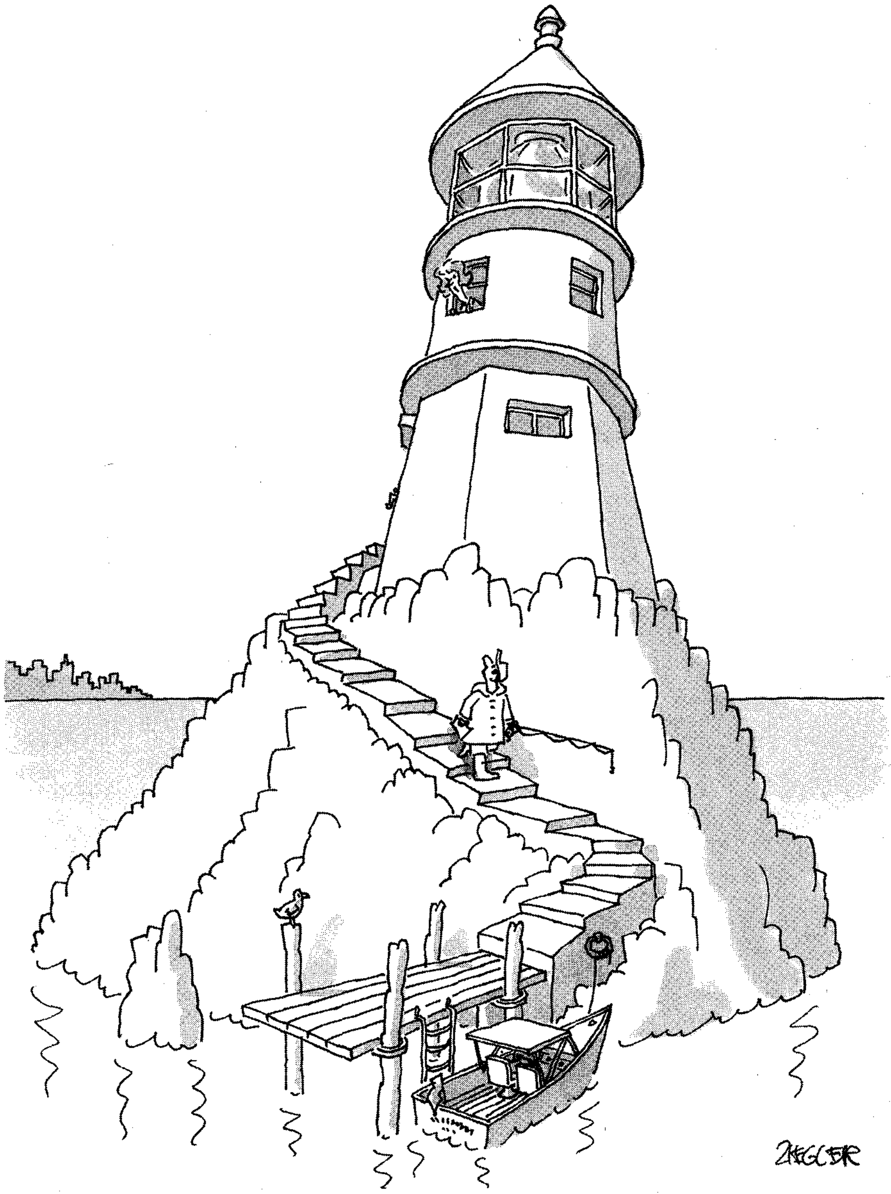
Count Panza came through with seed money, and later he sent his son over from Italy to work on the project. The money to lease and then to buy the crater and the surrounding land (six hundred and forty acres, at a hundred dollars an acre) came largely from the Dia Foundation, a uniquely freewheeling organization set up by Heiner Friedrich, a German art dealer, and Philippa de Menil, a young American heiress to the Schlumberger oil fortune, to help artists realize large-scale, visionary projects. Two of the earliest Dia grants went to Roden Crater and to Walter De Maria's Lightning Field, in New Mexico. Dia was soon supporting about a dozen other artists here and abroad, supporting them quite lavishly, in some cases, until the oil crisis in the early eighties knocked the bottom out of Schlumberger shares, and the de Menil family in Houston intervened. "I found out about it when the checks stopped," Turrell told me. "I had loans for more than four hundred thousand dollars, on equipment and stuff, and I had to sell things quickly. I ended up with thirty-eight thousand of negative equity. It was a tough time." Tough in several other ways as well. Turrell's career before that had looked like it was taking off. He had had an important show at the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam, in 1976, and in 1980 he had two well-received New York shows, one at the Leo Castelli Gallery (his first one-man gallery show) and the other at the Whitney Museum. Castelli didn't ask him to join the gallery, however, and the Whitney show turned out to be a financial disaster. Three viewers separately mistook a wall of light for a solid wall, and fell slap into the art. One of them broke her wrist, all three of them sued Turrell and the museum, and in one case the museum sued Turrell. This suit was quashed at the insistence of Flora Miller Biddle, the museum's president, but the individual cases cost Turrell time and money before they were settled out of court. Turrell's first marriage, to a professional harpist with whom he'd had two children, was breaking up at this time, which also happened to be the moment that the Dia Foundation withdrew its support. Turrell retreated to Arizona, where he spent the next nineteen months living alone in his cabin on the side of the crater.

Saint Anthony's
school for gifted parents

From then until the mid-nineteen-nineties, what support there was for the Roden Crater project came mostly from Turrell. He found various ways to keep it afloat. He continued to rebuild vintage airplanes, his workmanship so exquisite that he could resell them for a substantial profit. He became a cattle rancher, doing much of the heavy work himself until he could afford to hire a manager, who promised to make the ranch break even, and did so; this involved buying or leasing the grazing rights to considerably more land around the crater. In 1984, Turrell was awarded one of the so-called "genius grants" from the MacArthur Foundation. (Robert Irwin also got one that same year—they were the first two visual artists to become MacArthur fellows.) He did a lot of lecturing, and at a certain point he found he could charge a fee for installing shows of his light pieces—as much as ten thousand dollars per show. One year, he had sixteen one-man shows in this country, Europe, and Japan, and made a hundred and sixty thousand dollars doing it. Today, he estimates that he's had more than three hundred shows in all. (He shows in New York at the Pace Wildenstein gallery, which took him on permanently in 2001. A yearlong retrospective of his work is currently on view—through next spring—at the Mattress Factory, an alternative space in Pittsburgh.) There were also commissions here and abroad for skyspaces and other installations. Although not too much work got done on the crater during the nineteen-eighties and the early nineteen-nineties, quite a few of his one-man shows were also trial runs of ideas he wanted to realize there. When he wasn't travelling or lecturing or installing exhibitions, he stayed at his ranch in Arizona and worked on the increasingly complex master plan for the crater. Patience, cunning, and a sense of humor kept him sane. "If you don't fund an artist right away," he joked, "the project becomes more expensive."

The project has taken its toll, in years and relationships. Turrell has always been an elusive type; a young woman he lived with for a time in the nineteen-seventies told me that he just "evaporated" from her life, without warning, for reasons she could never discern. "He's an escape artist, in more ways than one," according to his old friend Alanna Heiss, the director of P.S. 1. "He escapes from responsibility, from domestic situations, from commitments. But the nature of his art is to escape from reality of all kinds, and he allows viewers to do the same." Turrell's second marriage, to Julia Brown, a museum professional who is currently the director of the American Federation of Arts, broke up in great bitterness in 1996, after eleven years and three more children. (He has six children in all, including one by a woman he didn't marry. His first child, who was two years old when he started the crater, and who is now a doctor in Flagstaff, recently gave birth to his first grandchild.) The divorce settlement with Brown involved a division of property, and as a result Turrell had to buy back her share of the ranch; he came as close as he ever has to going under financially, until the Lannan Foundation, in Santa Fe, decided in 1996 to devote major funding to the Roden Crater, among other art projects. Dia, restored to financial health and led by an imaginative and daring young director, Michael Govan, came back into the picture in 1998. Dia now raises money and acts as the administrative arm of the crater project, having taken over from the Skystone Foundation, which Turrell himself had set up after Dia pulled out, in 1981. For the last four years, Turrell has had bulldozers and construction crews carrying out the plans he's been refining for more than two decades, and if the money keeps flowing he thinks he can finish the job sometime in 2006.

His optimism these days is contagious. "It's like beginning," he tells me. "I should be a forty-year-old artist, in terms of the opportunity that's come now. Art went somewhere else in the eighties. It was a time for other artists, with the neo-expressionist scene that developed. We do have our time, our period. You have to deal with that, and with your ego, with the hubris that put you in this position, sitting on this mountain." His big frame shakes with quiet laughter. We are sitting in the airport cafeteria in Sedona, where he has just landed his 1939 Champion Scout two-seater (totally rebuilt and re-outfitted by Turrell), after flying me over Roden Crater. We are having breakfast with my wife and Kyung-Lim Lee, the Korean-born artist he lives with, who maintains a studio in New York but spends a lot of time at the ranch in Arizona—they drove down together from Flagstaff to meet us. One reason Turrell had wanted to fly me over the crater was to point out how little he has interfered with its natural shape and appearance. Banking low in a tight circle, at what seemed like only about ten feet above the bowl, I could see the openings for the Crater's Eye and the East Portal, and the four stone platforms for celestial viewing, but aside from that Roden looked more or less untouched. "It's a powerful geological form," he says now, sitting in the sun and putting away a high-calorie Western breakfast of eggs, bacon, and fries. "I wanted to keep the strength and beauty of that form. This is different from the land art of Smithson and the others. They want to make a place. Of course, Roden Crater is a place—now, you do feel that. But I don't want it not to be a volcano. I don't want to take that away." Then, after a longish silence, he adds, "It's such a privilege being involved with art." ♦



"And pick up a wine—something that goes with fish."

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FICTION

GALLATIN CANYON

BY THOMAS McGUANE

The day we planned the trip, I told Louise that I didn't like going to Idaho via the Gallatin Canyon. It's too narrow, and while trucks don't belong on this road, there they are, lots of them. Tourist pulloffs and wild animals on the highway complete the picture. We could have gone by way of Ennis, but Louise had learned that there were road repairs on Montana Highway 84—twelve miles of torn-up asphalt—in addition to its being rodeo weekend, and "Do we have to go to Idaho?" she asked.

I said that I thought it was obvious. A lot rode on the success of our little jaunt, which was ostensibly to close the sale of a small car dealership I owned in the sleepy town of Rigby. But, since accepting the offer of a local buyer, I had received a far better one from elsewhere, which, my attorney said, I couldn't take unless my original buyer backed out—and he would only back out if he got sufficiently angry at me. Said my attorney: Make him mad. So I was headed to Rigby, Idaho, expressly to piss off a small-town businessman, who was trying to give me American money for a going concern on the strip east of town, and thereby make room for a rich Atlanta investor, new to our landscapes, who needed this dealership as a kind of flagship for his other intentions. The question was how to provoke Rigby without arousing his suspicions, and I might have collected my thoughts a little better had I not had to battle trucks and tourists in the Gallatin Canyon.

Louise and I had spent a lot of time together in recent years, and we were both probably wondering where things would go from here. She had been married, briefly, long ago, and that fact, together with the relatively peaceful intervening years, gave a pleasant detachment to most of her relationships, including the one she had with me. In the past, that would have suited me perfectly; but it did not seem to suit me now, and I was so powerfully attached to her it made me uncomfortable that she wasn't interested in discussing our mutual future, though at least she had never suggested that we wouldn't *have* one. With her thick blond hair pulled back in a barrette, her strong, shapely figure, and the direct fullness of her mouth, she was often noticed by other men. After ten years in Montana, she still had a strong Massachusetts accent. Louise was a lawyer, specializing in the adjudication of water rights between agricultural and municipal interests. In our rapidly changing world, she was much in demand. Though I wished we could spend more time together, Louise had taught me not to challenge her on this.

No longer the country crossroads of recent memory, Four Corners was filled with dentists' offices, fast-food and espresso shops, large and somehow foreboding filling stations that looked, at night, like colonies in space; nevertheless, the intersection was true to its name, sending you north to a transcontinental interstate, east into town, west to the ranches of Madison County, and south, my reluctant choice, up the Gallatin Canyon to Yellowstone and the towns of southeast Idaho, one of which contained property with my name on the deed.

We joined the stream of traffic heading south, the Gallatin River alongside and usually much below the roadway, a dashing high-gradient river with anglers in reflective stillness at the edges of its pools, and bright rafts full of delighted tourists in flotation jackets and crash helmets sweeping through its white water. Gradually, the mountains pressed in on all this humanity, and I found myself behind a long line of cars trailing a cattle truck at well below the speed limit. This combination of cumbersome commercial traffic and impatient private cars was a lethal mixture that kept our canyon in the papers, as it regularly spat out corpses. In my rearview mirror, I could see a line behind me that was just as long as the one ahead, stretching back, thinning, and vanishing around a green bend. There was no passing lane for several miles. A single amorous elk could have turned us all into twisted, smoking metal.

"You might have been right," Louise said. "It doesn't look good."

She almost certainly had better things to do. But, looking down the line of cars, I felt my blood pressure rising. Her hands rested quietly in her lap. I couldn't possibly have rivalled such serenity.

"How do you plan to anger this guy in Rigby?" she asked.

"I'm going to try haughtiness. If I suggest that he bought the dealership cheap, he might tell me to keep the damn thing. The Atlanta guy just wants to start *somewhere*. All these people have a sort of parlay mentality and they need to get on the playing field before they can start running it up. I'm a trader. It all happens for me in the transition. The moment of liquidation is the essence of capitalism."

"What about the man in Rigby?"

"He's an end user. He wants to keep it."

I reflected on the pathos of ownership and the way it could bog you down.

"You should be in my world," Louise said. "According to the law, water has no reality except its use. In Montana, water isn't even wet. Every time some misguided soul suggests that fish need it, it ends up in the state supreme court."

Birds were fleeing the advance of automobiles. I was elsewhere, trying to imagine my buyer, red-faced, storming out of the closing. I'd offer to let bygones be bygones, I'd take him to dinner, I'd throw a steak into him, for Christ's sake. In the end, he'd be glad he wasn't stuck with the lot.

Traffic headed toward us, far down the road. We were all packed together to make sure no one tried to pass. The rules had to be enforced. Occasionally, someone drifted out for a better look, but not far enough that someone else could close his space and possibly seal his fate.

This trip had its risks. I had only recently admitted to myself that I would like to make more of my situation with Louise than currently existed. Though ours was hardly a chaste relationship, real intimacy was relatively scarce. People in relationships nowadays seemed to retain their secrets like bank deposits—they always set some aside, in case they might need them to spend on someone new. I found it unpleasant to think that Louise could be withholding anything.

But I thought I was more presentable than I had been. When Louise and I first met, I was just coming off two and a half years of peddling satellite dishes in towns where a couple of dogs doing the wild thing in the middle of the road amounted to the high point of a year, and the highest-grossing business was a methamphetamine tent camp out in the sagebrush. Now I had caught the upswing in our local economy—cars, storage, tool rental, and mortgage-discounting. I had a pretty home, debt-free, out on Sourdough. I owned a few things. I could be O.K. I asked Louise what she thought of the new prosperity around us. She said, wearily, "I'm not sure it's such a good thing, living in a boomtown. It's basically a high-end carny atmosphere."

We were just passing Storm Castle and Garnet Mountain. When I glanced in the mirror, I saw a low red car with a scoop in its hood pull out to pass. I must have reacted somehow, because Louise asked me if I would like her to drive.

"No, that's fine. Things are getting a bit lively back there."

"Drive defensively."

"Not much choice, is there?"

I had been mentally rehearsing the closing in Rigby, and I wasn't getting anywhere. I had this sort of absurd picture of myself strutting into the meeting. I tried again to picture the buyer looking seriously annoyed, but I'd met him before and he seemed pretty levelheaded. I suspected I'd have to be really outlandish to get a rise out of him. He was a fourth-generation resident of Rigby, so I could always urge him to get to know his neighbors, I decided. Or, since he had come up through the service department, I could try emphasizing the need to study how the cars actually ran. I'd use hand signals to fend off objections. I felt more secure.

Some elk had wandered into the parking lot at Buck's T4 and were grazing indifferently as people pulled off the highway to admire them. I don't know if it was the great unmarred blue sky overhead or the balsamic zephyr that poured down the mountainside, but I found myself momentarily buoyed by all this idleness, people out of their cars. I am always encouraged when I see animals doing something other than running for their lives. In any case, the stream of traffic ahead of us had been much reduced by the pedestrian rubbernecking.

"My husband lived here one winter," Louise said. "He sold his pharmacy after we divorced, not that he had to, and set

STEPHEN SHORE, "US 97 SOUTH OF KLAMATH FALLS, OREGON 7/21/1973"/303 GALLERY, NY

out to change his life. He became a mountain man, wore buckskin clothes. He tried living off the land one day a week, with the idea that he would build up. But then he just stuck with one day a week—he'd shoot a rabbit or something, more of a diet, really. He's a real-estate agent now, at Big Sky. I think he's doing well. At least he's quit killing rabbits."

"Remarried?"

"Yes."

As soon as we hit the open country around West Yellowstone, Louise called her office. When her secretary put her on hold, Louise covered the mouthpiece and said, "He married a super gal. Minnesota, I think. She should be good for Bob, and he's not easy. Bob's from the South. For men, it's a full-time job being Southern. It just wears them out. It wore me out, too. I developed doubtful behaviors. I pulled out my eyelashes, and ate twenty-eight hundred dollars' worth of macadamia nuts."

Her secretary came back on the line, and Louise began editing her schedule with impressive precision, mouthing the word "sorry" to me when the conversation dragged on. I began musing about my capacity to live successfully with someone as competent as Louise. There was no implied hierarchy of status between us, but I wondered if, in the long run, something would have to give.

West Yellowstone seemed entirely given over to the well-being of the snowmobile, and the billboards dedicated to it were anomalous on a sunny day like today. By winter, schoolchildren would be petitioning futilely to control the noise at night so that they could do their schoolwork, and the town would turn a blind eye as a cloud of smoke arose to gas residents, travellers, and park rangers alike. It seemed incredible to me that recreation could acquire this level of social momentum, that it could be seen as an inalienable right.

We came down Targhee Pass and into Idaho, into a wasteland of spindly pines that had replaced the former forest, and Louise gave voice to the thoughts she'd been having for the past few miles. "Why don't you just let this deal close? You really have no guarantees from the man from Atlanta. And there's a good-faith issue here, too, I think."

"A lawyerly notation."

"So be it, but it's true. Are you trying to get every last cent out of this sale?"

"That's second. The first priority is to be done with it. It was meant to be a passive investment, and it has turned out not to be. I get twenty calls a day from the dealership, most with questions I can't answer. It's turning me into a giant bullshit machine."

"No investments are really passive."

"Mutual funds are close."

"That's why they don't pay."

"Some of them pay, or they would cease to exist."

"You make a poor libertarian, my darling. You sound like that little puke David Stockman."

"Stockman was right about everything. Reagan just didn't have the guts to take his advice."

"*Reagan*. Give me a break."

I didn't mind equal billing in a relationship, but I did dread the idea of parties speaking strictly from their entitlements across a chasm. Inevitably, sex would make chaos of much of this, but you couldn't, despite Benjamin Franklin's suggestion, "use venery" as a management tool.

Louise adjusted her seat back and folded her arms, gazing at the sunny side of the road. The light through the windshield accentuated the shape of her face, now in repose. I found her beautiful. I adored her when she was a noun and was alarmed when she was a verb, which was usually the case. I understood that this was not the best thing I could say about myself. When her hand drifted over to my leg, I hardly knew what to do with this reference to the other life we led. I knew that it was an excellent thing to be reminded of how inconsequential my worldly concerns were, but one warm hand, rested casually, and my interest travelled to the basics of the species.

Ashton, St. Anthony, Sugar City: Mormon hamlets, small farms, and the furious reordering of watersheds into industrial canals. Irrigation haze hung over the valley of the Snake, and the skies were less bright than they had been just a few miles back, in Montana. Many locals had been killed when the Teton Dam burst, and despite that they wanted to build it again: the relationship to water here was like a war, and in war lives are lost. These were the folk to whom I'd sold many a plain car; ostentation was thoroughly unacceptable hereabouts. The four-door sedan with a six-cylinder engine was the desired item, an identical one with a hundred and fifty thousand miles on it generally taken in trade at zero value, thanks to the manipulation of rebates against the manufacturer's suggested retail. Appearances were foremost, and the salesman who could leave a customer's smugness undisturbed flourished in this atmosphere. I had two of them, potato-fattened, bland opportunists with nine kids between them. They were the asset I was selling; the rest was little more than bricks and mortar.

We pressed on toward Rexburg, and amid the turnoffs for Wilford, Newdale, Hibbard, and Moody the only thing that had any flavor was Hog Hollow Road, which was a shortcut to France—not the one in Europe but the one just a hop, skip, and a jump south of Squirrel, Idaho. There were license-plate holders with my name on them in Squirrel, and I was oddly vain about that.

"Sure seems lonesome around here," Louise said.

"Oh, boy."

"The houses are like little forts."

"The winters are hard." But it was less that the small neat dwellings around us appeared defensive than that they seemed to be trying to avoid attracting the wrath of some inattentive god.

"It looks like government housing for Eskimos. They just sit inside waiting for a whale, or something."

This banter had the peculiar effect of making me want to cleave to Louise, and desperately, too—to build a warm new civilization, possibly in a foolish house with turrets. The road stretched before me like an arrow. There was only enough of it left before Rigby for me to say, perhaps involuntarily, "I wonder if we shouldn't just get married."

Louise quickly looked away. Her silence conferred a certain seriousness on my question.

But there was Rigby, and, in the parlance of all who have extracted funds from locals, Rigby had been good to me. Main Street was lined with ambitious and beautiful stone buildings, old for this part of the world. Their second and third floors were now affordable housing, and their street levels were occupied by businesses hanging on by their fingernails. You could still detect the hopes of the dead, their dreams, even, though it seemed to be only a matter of time before the wind carried them away, once and for all.

I drove past the car lot at 200 East Fremont without comment and—considering the amount of difficulty it had caused me in the years before I got it stabilized and began to enjoy its very modest yields—without much feeling. I remembered the day, sometime earlier, when I had tried to help park the cars in the front row and got everything so crooked that the salesmen, not concealing their contempt, had to do it all over again. The title company where we were heading was on the same street, and it was a livelier place, from the row of perky evergreens out front to the merry receptionist who greeted us, a handsome young woman, probably a farm girl only moments before, enjoying the clothes, makeup, and perquisites of the new world that her firm was helping to build.

We were shown into a spacious conference room with a long table and chairs, freshly sharpened pencils, and crisp notepads bearing the company letterhead. "Shall I stay?" Louise asked, the first thing she'd said since my earlier inadvertent remark, which I intuited had not been altogether rejected.

"Please," I said, gesturing toward a chair next to the one I meant to take. At that moment, the escrow agent entered and, standing very close to us, introduced himself as Brent Colby. Then he went to the far end of the table, where he spread his documents around in an orderly fan. Colby was around fifty, with iron-gray hair and a deeply lined face. He wore pressed jeans, a brilliant-white snap-button shirt, cowboy boots, and a belt buckle with a steer head on it. He had thick, hairy hands and a gleaming wedding band. Just as he raised his left wrist to check his watch, the door opened and Oren Johnson, the buyer, entered. He went straight to Louise and, taking her hand in both of his, introduced himself. It occurred to me that, in trying to be suave, Oren Johnson had revealed himself to be a clodhopper, but I was probably just experiencing the mild hostility that emanates from every sale of property. Oren wore a suit, though it suggested less a costume for business than one for church. He had a gold tooth and a cautious pompadour. He, too, bore an investment-grade wedding band, and I noted that there was plenty of room in his black-laced shoes for his toes. He turned and said that it was good to see me again after so long. The time had come for me to go into my act. With grotesque hauteur, I said that I didn't realize we had ever met. This was work.

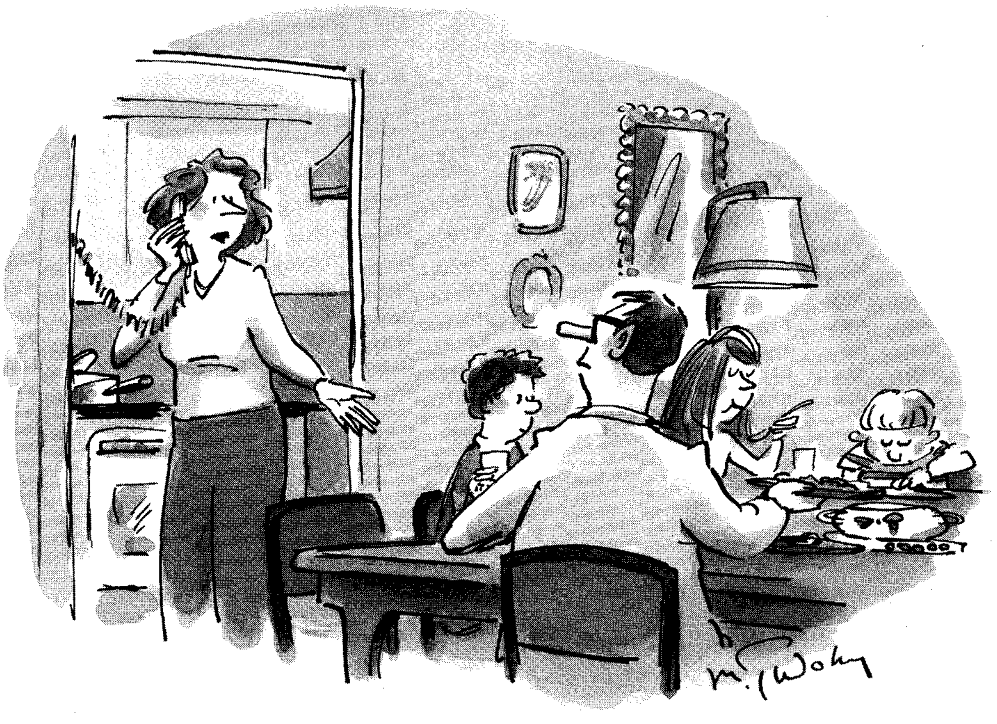
Oren Johnson bustled with inchoate energy; he was the kind of small-town leader who sets an example by silently getting things done. He suggested this just by arranging his pencils and notepad and repositioning his chair with rough precision. Locking eyes with me, he stated that he was a man of his word. I didn't know what he was getting at, but took it to mean that the formalities of a closing were superfluous to the old-time handshake with which Oren Johnson customarily did business. I smiled and quizzically cocked my head as if to say that the newfangled arrangements with well-attested documents promptly conveyed to the courthouse suited me just fine, that deals made on handshakes were strictly for the pious or the picturesque. My message was clear enough that Louise shifted uncomfortably in her chair, and Brent Colby knocked his documents edgewise on the desk to align them. As far as Oren Johnson was concerned, I was beginning to feel that anyone who strayed from the basic patterns of farm life to sell cars bore watching. Like a Method actor, I already believed my part.

"You're an awfully lucky man, Oren Johnson," I said to him, leaning back in my chair. I could see Louise open-mouthed two seats away from Brent Colby, and observing myself through her eyes gave me a sudden burst of panic.

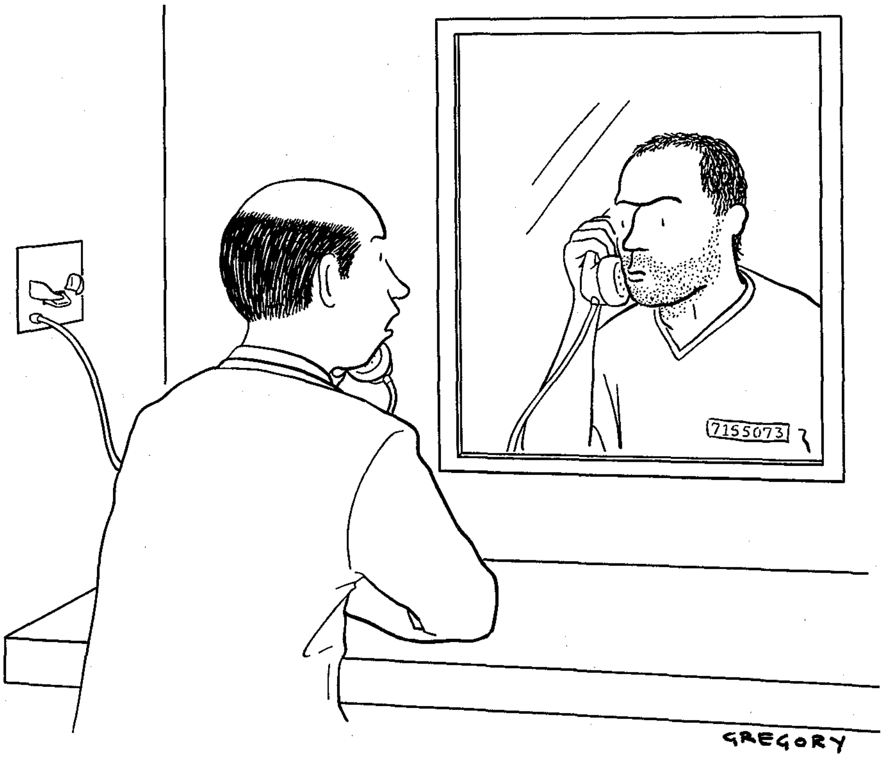
"Oh?" Oren Johnson said. "How's that?"

"*How's that*?" I did a precise job of replicating his inflection. "I am permitting you to purchase my car lot. You've seen the books: how often does a man get a shot at a business where all the work's been done for him?"

Brent Colby was doing an incomplete job of concealing his distaste; he was enough of a tinhorn to clear



"Do we want to be members of a small, élite club of families willing to respond to insurance-survey questions during dinnertime?"



"We're going to try an insanity defense, so don't wear too nice a tie."

his throat theatrically. But Oren Johnson treated this as a colossal interruption and cast a firm glance his way.

"It doesn't look all that automatic to me," he said.

"Aw, hell, you're just going to coin it. Pull the lever and relax!"

"What about the illegal oil dump? I wish I had a nickel for every crankcaseful that went into that hole. Then I wouldn't worry about what's going to happen when the D.E.Q. lowers the boom."

"Maybe you ought to ride your potato harvester another year or two, if you're so risk-averse. Cars are the future. They're not for everybody."

Oren Johnson's face reddened. He pushed his pencils and notepad almost out of reach in the middle of the conference table. He contemplated these supplies a moment before raising his eyes to mine. "I suppose you could put this car lot where the sun don't shine, if that suits you."

Johnson having taken a stand, I immediately felt unsure that I even had another buyer. Had I ever acknowledged how much I longed to get rid of this business and put an end to all those embarrassing phone calls? I wanted to hand the moment off to someone else while I collected my thoughts, but as I looked around the room I found no one who was interested in rescuing me—least of all Louise, who had raised one eyebrow at the vast peculiarity of my performance. Suddenly, I was desperate to keep the deal from falling apart. I gave my head a little twist to free my neck from the constrictions of my collar. I performed this gesture too vigorously, and I had the feeling that it might seem like the first movement of some sort of dance filled with sensual flourishes and bordering on the moronic. I had lost my grip.

"Oren," I said, and the familiarity seemed inappropriate. "I was attached to this little enterprise. I wanted to be sure you valued it."

The deal closed, and I had my check. I tipped back in my chair to think of a few commemorative words for the new owner, but the two men left the room without giving me the chance to speak. I shrugged at Louise, and she, too, rose to go, pausing a moment beneath an enormous Kodachrome of a bugling elk. I was aware of her distance, and I sensed that my waffling hadn't gone over particularly well. I concluded that at no time in the future would I act out a role to accomplish anything. This decision quickly evaporated with the realization that that is practically all we do in life. Comedy failed, too. When I told Louise that I had been within an inch of opening a can of whup-ass on the buyer, I barely got a smile. There's nothing more desolating than having a phrase like that die on your lips.

It was dark when we got back to Targhee Pass. Leaving town, we passed the Beehive assisted-living facility and the Riot Zone, a "family fun park." Most of the citizens we spotted there seemed unlikely rioters. I drove past a huge neon steak, its blue T-bone flashing above a restaurant that was closed and dark. There were deer on the road, and once, as we passed through a murky section of forest, we saw the pale faces of children waiting to cross.

"What are they doing out at this hour?"

"I don't know," Louise said.

I made good time on the pine flats north of the Snowmobile Capital of the World, and I wondered what it would be like to live in a town that was the world capital of a mechanical gadget. In Rigby, we had seen a homely museum dedicated to Philo T. Farnsworth, the inventor of television, which featured displays of Farnsworth's funky assemblages of tubes and wire and, apparently, coat hangers—stuff his wife was probably always attempting to throw out, a goal Louise supported. "Too bad Mama Farnsworth didn't take all that stuff to the dump," she said.

We had the highway to ourselves, and clouds of stars seemed to rise up from the wilderness, lighting the treetops in a cool fire. Slowly, the canyon closed in around us, and we entered its flowing, dark space.

The idyll ended just past the ranger station at Black Butte, when a car pulled in behind us abruptly enough that I checked my speed to see if I was violating the limit, but I wasn't. Then the car was very close, and the driver shifted his lights to a high beam so intense that I could see our shadows on the dashboard, my knuckles on the steering wheel glaringly white. I was nearly blinded by my own mirrors, which I hastily adjusted.

I said, "What's with this guy?"

"Just let him pass."

"I don't know that he wants to."

I softened my pressure on the gas pedal. I thought that by easing my already moderate speed I would politely suggest that he might go by me. I even hugged the shoulder, but he remained glued to our bumper. There was something about this that reminded me strongly of my feeling of failure back in Rigby, but I was unable to put my finger on it. Maybe it was the hot light of liquidation, in the glare of which all motives seem laid bare. I slowed down even more without managing to persuade my tormentor to pass. "Jesus," Louise said. "Pull over." In her accent, it came out as "pull ovah."

I moved off to the side of the road slowly and predictably, but although I had stopped, the incandescent globes persisted in our rearview mirror. "This is very strange," Louise said.

"Shall I go back and speak to him?"

After considering for a moment, she said, "No."

"Why?"

"Because this is not normal."

I put the car in gear again and pulled back onto the highway. The last reasonable thought I had was that I would proceed to Bozeman as though nothing were going on, and once I was back in civilization my tormentor's behavior would be visible to all, and I could, if necessary, simply drive to the police station with him in tow.

Our blinding, syncopated journey continued another mile before we reached a sweeping eastward bend, closely guarded by the canyon walls. I knew that just beyond the bend there was a scenic pulloff, and that the approaching curve was acute enough for a small lead to put me out of sight. Whether or not this was plausible, I had no idea: I was exhilarated to be taking a firm hand in my own affairs. And a firm foot! As we entered the narrows, I pinned the accelerator, and we shot into the dark. Louise grabbed the front edges of her seat and stared at the road twisting in front of us. She emitted something like a moan, which I had heard before in a very different context. Halfway around the curve, my tormentor vanished behind us, and although my car seemed only marginally under control, the absence of blinding light was a relief as we fled into darkness.

When we emerged and the road straightened, I turned off my lights. I was going so fast I felt light-headed, but the road was visible under the stars, and I was able to brake hard and drop down into the scenic turnoff. Seconds later, our new friend shot past, lights blazing into nowhere. He was clearly determined to catch us: his progress up the canyon was rapid and increasingly erratic. We watched in fascination until the lights suddenly jerked sideways, shining in white cones across the river, turned downward, then disappeared.

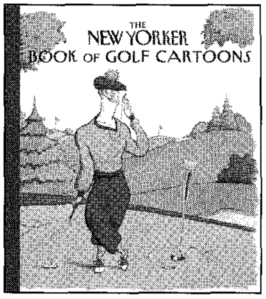
I heard Louise say, in a tone of reasonable observation, "He went in."

I had an urgent feeling that took a long time to turn into words. "Did I do that?"

She shook her head, and I pulled out onto the highway, my own headlights on once more. I drove in an odd, measured way, as if bound for an undesired destination, pulled along by something outside myself, thinking: Liquidation. We could see where he'd gone through the guardrail. We pulled over and got out. Any hope we might have had for the driver—and we shall be a long time determining if we had any—was gone the minute we looked down from the riverbank. The car was submerged, its lights still burning freakishly, illuminating a bulge of crystalline water, a boulder in the exuberance of a mountain watershed. Presently, the lights sank into blackness, and only the silver sheen of river in starlight remained.

Louise cried, "I wish I could *feel* something!" And when I reached to comfort her she shoved me away. I had no choice but to climb back up to the roadway.

After that, I could encounter Louise only by telephone. I told her that he'd had a record as long as your arm. "It's not enough!" she said. I called later to say that he was of German and Italian extraction. That proved equally unsatisfactory, and when I called to inform her that he hailed from Wisconsin she just hung up on me, this time for good. ♦



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THE CRITICS

POP MUSIC

GLACIER HEAD

Björk retraces her steps.

BY HILTON ALS

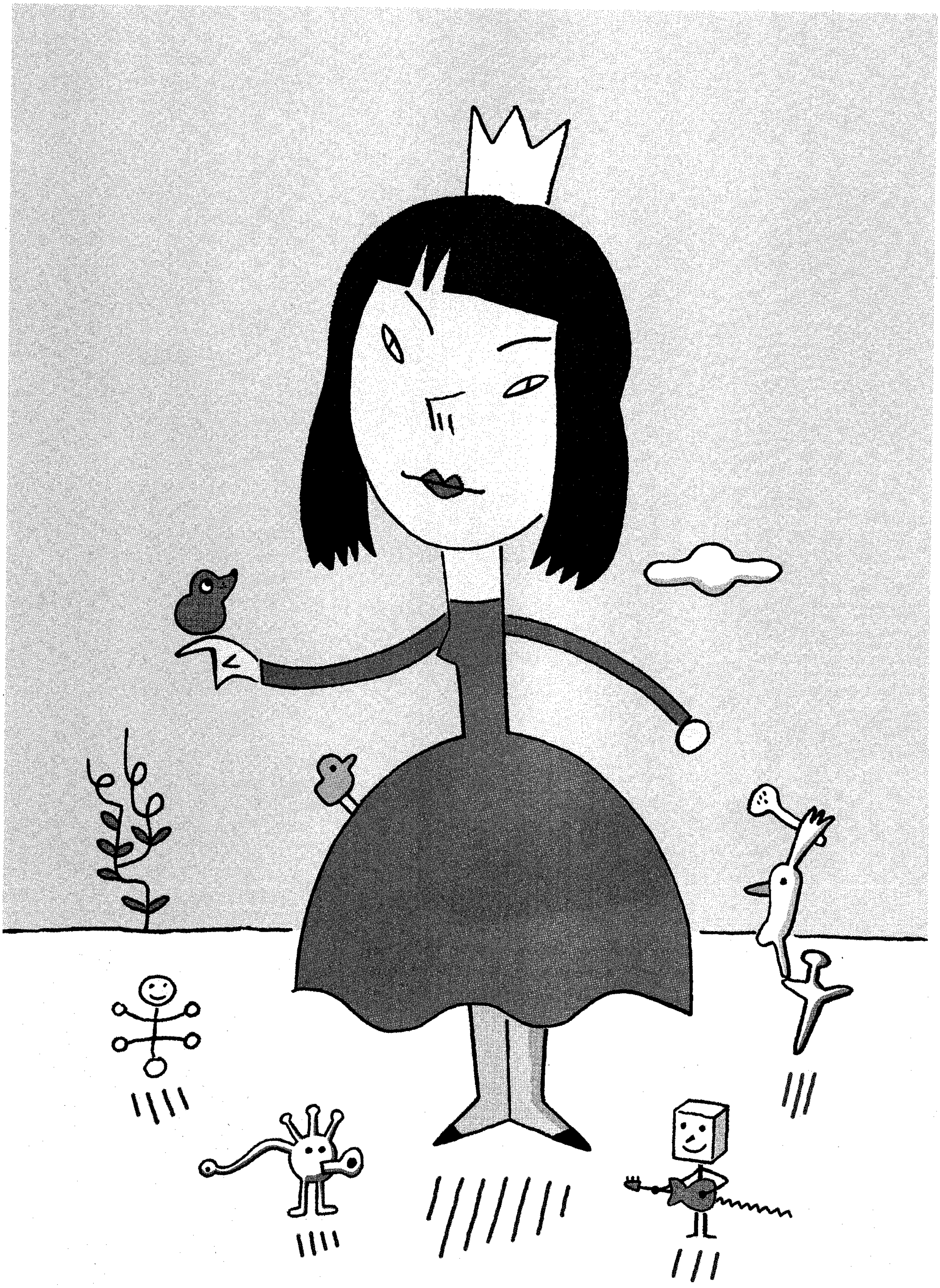
The thirty-seven-year-old singer and songwriter Björk titled her fourth solo CD, released in 2001, "Vespertine"—a word used to describe things that flower or flourish in the evening—and, listening to the album, you can almost smell the associations: the heady but ethereal perfume of night blossoms; the dripping wax of candles lit for vespers; the drugs burning as the telephone rings, the answering machine set to mute. Björk conjures up colder references, too: in particular, the image of herself trekking across "the glacier head" of her native Iceland, "looking . . . for moments of shine," as she sings in "Aurora," one of the album's strongest tracks. Björk makes us feel the clammy toes in damp fur boots, see the fur-hatted girl on a glistening sphere of snow, using her voice to make the ice crack.

It is that voice—her lungs are like an accordion filled with broken glass—that we can appreciate in all its emotional eclecticism on the newly released six-CD set "Family Tree." The set includes a disk of Björk's "Greatest Hits," as she sees them—a selection that incorporates several of her arresting B-sides. (Another "Greatest Hits" was released a few months ago, chosen by fans online. Predictably, they went mostly for songs that were dance hits.) Two other CDs, "Strings" and "Beats," examine the ways in which the classical music and avant-garde electronica Björk studied early in her career inform her work and make her what she is—a glamorous and highly trained computer geek. (The boxed set also makes clear her interest in world music as a metaphor for community. Her first touring band featured international musicians, ranging from an Iranian keyboard player and an Indian tabla player to a Barbadian bassist—not the best strategy if you want to cross over, but there you have it.) As an anthology of Björk's sound, and as a chronicle of where she's been as a solo artist for the ten years since she left her enormously successful band, the Sugarcubes, "Family Tree" is useful, if somewhat skeletal; it lacks the slowly evolving density of her four solo albums, on which her story—as a star with a hit album at age eleven and international fame at twenty-eight, and as an immigrant in search of a home, love, and a place in music—unfolds with a kind of itchy grace.

Recorded in London, Björk's first solo album, "Début" (1993), was produced by Nellee Hooper, who studied in the school of beautiful and urbane sound popularized by the band Massive Attack on its 1991 album "Blue Lines." Soulful and just this side of depressed, Massive Attack combined rap and house music with certain technological innovations that began with spinning: letting the record drag, playing the scratches as a sonic element, and so on. Björk married her white soul—the pathos of the provincial—to Massive Attack's blacker, more sophisticated riffs: a form of musical miscegenation. What made "Début" all the more refreshing was her uncommercial approach. There was no pre-sell. There were no hair extensions. And Björk never, as so many singer-songwriters do, wrote songs about regret. She was an ascetic interested in sexual abandon, and she whooped and swooped her way through her first three albums, until she reached the culmination of the quieter "Vespertine." As a maturing artist, it seemed, she had less to prove; she had told her story, and now it was time to understand it.

Singing is mostly breathing, and the best singers can make that breath resonate as pure feeling. There were great physical singers before Björk—Janis Joplin, for instance, and Patti LaBelle—singers who turn us on with the exaltation they experience as they meld control with release. We've had our share of truly cerebral singers, too—warbling wordsmiths like Chrissie Hynde, who are as interested in what they have to say as in how they say it. But what makes even Björk's failures interesting is the way she uses the rhythms of speech to make us actually hear her ideas forming. Her literally breathtaking song "Headphones," for instance, co-produced with the studio artist Tricky and released on "Post" (1995), her second solo album, is ostensibly a letter thanking a friend for a tape, but the song's most moving passages involve not Björk's lyrics but her inhalations and exhalations, her tentative vowels, her sharp intakes of air, her sustained notes, all mixed with the sparest instrumentation—a snap drum, random phrases from an electric guitar, the sound of waves crashing against the shore. "Sounds go through the muscles," she sings. "These abstract wordless move-ments move-move-move-move-move." Björk's vocal rhythms resonate because she is never afraid to break through the surface of her own contralto. She is in a constant headlong rush toward her limits. We worry not about whether she can reach the realm of pure sound but about whether she'll be able to come back down from that high sonic plane. Judy Garland crossed with Stockhausen, she wants to write songs that we can all appreciate, but she layers the emotion with instrumental experimentation.

There is a lot of air in Björk's lyr-



Judy Garland crossed with Stockhausen: Björk is in a constant headlong rush toward her limits.

ics. Like Billie Holiday on her masterly late-career album "Lady in Satin," she knows that, for certain singers, the less said the better. She takes the abstraction of Holiday's work—the improvisatory quality of jazz—and applies it to the pop structure. She is more interested in tonality than in language, and her singing is never just "happy" or "sad"; it is a patchwork of feeling stitched together with light rhymes and orchestrations that owe a great deal to the Brian Eno school of bubbling sound. It is also full of holes, gaps left open to the listener's imagination. On "Vespertine," for instance, Björk collaborated with Matmos, a San Francisco-based duo who incorporated various ambient sounds into her songs: cards being dealt, water boiling, and so on. When she doesn't leave those spaces between words—when her vocabulary becomes too thick and clotted—her songs tip over into whimsy, a fantasyland replete with butterflies and rainbows and dancing elves. This was the case with some of the tracks on "Selmasongs" (2000), her soundtrack for the Lars von Trier film "Dancer in the Dark." (Von Trier co-wrote the lyrics for "Selmasongs," and you can also feel the heavy influence of Dogma.)

But what makes Björk stand out most is the ostentatious theatricality of her isolation; she's the girl who longs for the unpopular guy, a lonesome cowboy whose internal life mirrors her own. She's drawn to the infernal side of love. In the free verse of her song "Unravel," on "Strings"—"While you are away / My heart comes undone / Slowly unravels / In a ball of yarn / The devil collects it / With a grin"—one hears echoes of Yum-Yum's solo in "The Mikado" ("I mean to rule the earth / As he the sky / We really know our worth / The sun and I"). Björk, like Gilbert and Sullivan, is interested in the emotive voice. Perhaps to mark the next decade of her evolution, she should write an operetta, too—one based, say, on "Wuthering Heights," the story of a marginal girl and the outsider she loves. ♦

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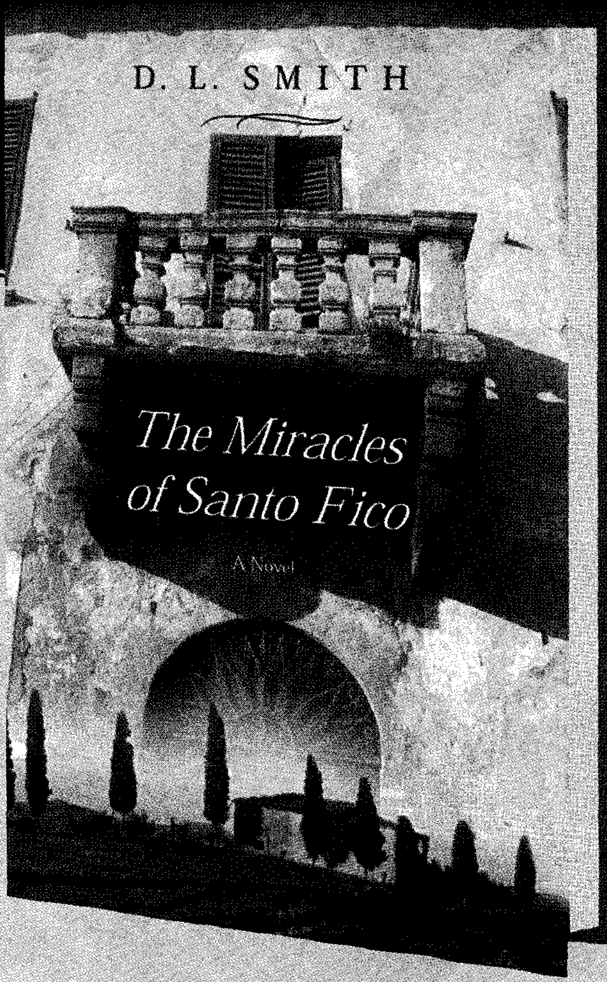

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BOOKS

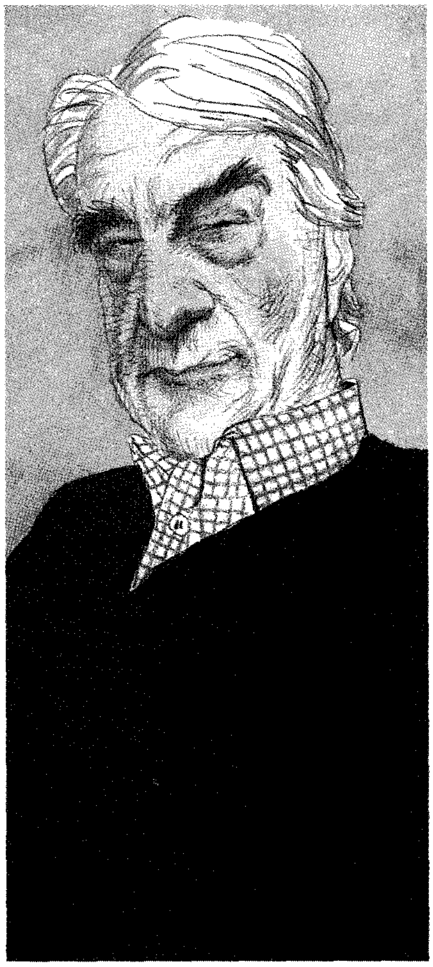
THE LONE SAILOR

Tales of a colorful voyage to nowhere.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

A writer's time is hard to waste. The Bogotá-born, Brussels-reared, Mexico City-dwelling poet and prose writer Álvaro Mutis, obliged to make a living, must have often rued the many hours he spent travelling to drab ports and shaking strange hands when he was Standard Oil's head of public relations in Colombia. Then, for twenty-three years in Mexico City, he worked the media mills as sales manager for the television divisions of several Hollywood film companies. And yet without this rambling career how could he have supplied the eerie wealth of maritime and dockside details, the delirious abundance of geographic and culinary specifics, that give fascination and global resonance to his novella-length tales of Maqroll the Gaviero? These, produced in a rush of deferred inspiration when Mutis was in his sixties, have won him international recognition and, in 2002, the Neustadt Prize for Literature. The seven separately published Maqroll books (Mutis, now seventy-nine, is reported to be working on an eighth) were collected in 1993 as "Empresas y Tribulaciones de Maqroll el Gaviero," and have been translated into English, by the tireless, versatile Edith Grossman, as "The Adventures and Misadventures of Maqroll" (New York Review Books; $16.95).

The tidy paperback volume, exactly seven hundred pages of smallish Trump Mediaeval, with a warm and informative introduction by Francisco Goldman, has the supple heft of a newborn classic, a latter-day "Don Quixote" whose central persona, both amusingly shadowy and adamantly consistent, moves around the globe somewhat as the Knight of the Mournful Countenance traversed the plains of Spain. Employing a resourceful variety of narrative textures and strategies, Mutis follows his hero through incidents of a Conradian exoticism; the narrative method, like that of Conrad, picturesquely involves the assembly of a coherent story from scattered documents, distant rumors, and elaborately couched secondhand recountings on betranced tropical verandas. Yet Mutis denies any influence from Conrad, citing instead Proust and Dickens as prime inspirations. "A real influence," Goldman quotes him as saying, "is an author who communicates an energy and a great desire to tell a story. And it isn't that you want to write like Dickens, but rather that when you read Dickens, you feel an imaginative energy which you use to your own ends."


Álvaro Mutis

The problem of energy, in this enervated postmodern era, keeps arising in Mutis's pursuit of a footloose, offhandedly erudite, inexplicably attractive shady character. A lowly seaman with some high-flying acquaintances on land, Maqroll is a drifter who tends to lose interest in his adventures before the dénouement is reached. Readers even slightly acquainted with Latin-American modernism will hear echoes of Borges's cosmic portentousness, of Julio Cortázar's fragmenting ingenuities, of Machado De Assis's crisp pessimism, and of the something perversely hearty in Mutis's fellow-Colombian and good friend Gabriel García Márquez—a sense of genial amplitude, as when a ceremonious host sits us down to a lunch provisioned to stretch into evening. Descriptions of food consumed and of drinks drunk, amid flourishes of cosmopolitan connoisseurship, are frequent in Mutis, even as the ascetic Maqroll goes hungry. North Americans may be reminded of Melville—more a matter, perhaps, of affinity than of influence. *Gaviero* in Spanish means "lookout"; Maqroll was one as a boy, in his first years at sea—"I had to climb to the top of the tallest mast and tell the crew what was on the horizon"—and Ishmael, too, was a topman, feeling himself, "a hundred feet above the silent decks, striding along the deep, as if the masts were gigantic stilts," and revolving within himself "the problem of the universe." Both writers, through their wayfaring alter egos, stubbornly stare at a universe that, though apparently devoid of God, seems still to brim with obscure metaphysical import. "And some certain significance lurks in all things," Ishmael reasons, "else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher."

Mutis began as a poet and, until these Maqroll tales, was best known as one, though in Mexico his voice was widely broadcast; he did the voice-over in the Spanish-language version of the TV serial "The Untouchables." Maqroll appeared as a character in Mutis's poems when the poet was a mere nineteen, and has been a frequent presence in his poetry ever since. In 1986, according to Mutis, he realized, while editing the French translation of a prose poem entitled "The Snow of the Admiral," that "it wasn't a poem but a piece of a novel" and, "with a great sense of fatigue," proceeded to write the novel, sending its three hundred manuscript pages to his agent in Barcelona along with the disclaimer, worthy of Maqroll's own diffidence, "I don't know what the devil this is." He was reassured that it was "quite simply a wonderful novel," and in five years he produced six more books about Maqroll.

"The Snow of the Admiral" is indeed poemlike, and of these novellas the most intense and surreal in its atmospherics. The author begins with a solemnly circumstantial description of how, browsing in a secondhand bookstore in Barcelona, he picked up a beautiful edition of a nineteenth-century volume on the assassination of the Duke of Orleans, and found, in a pocket in the back intended for maps and genealogical tables, a quantity of pink, yellow, and blue commercial forms covered with tiny writing, "somewhat tremulous and feverish I thought," in a purple indelible pencil "occasionally darkened by the author's saliva." This shaky document proves to be a diary Maqroll kept while journeying up the (fictional) Xurandó River in a diesel-powered, flat-keeled barge. The captain of this quixotic craft, mourning a lost mistress, methodically keeps himself semi-inebriated; the boat's mechanic is a silent Indian; and the pilot's "features, gestures, voice, and other personal traits have been carried to so perfect a degree of non-existence that they can never stay in our memories." The only other passenger is a "calm blond giant who chews a few words in an almost incomprehensible Slavic accent, and constantly smokes the foul tobacco that the pilot sells to him at an exorbitant price." Maqroll is headed for some rumored sawmills far upriver, beyond treacherous rapids, where he hopes to arrange for the transport and sale of lumber downriver. The project feels as futile as it is vague. He says to himself:

> These disasters, these decisions that are wrong from the start, these dead ends that constitute the story of my life, are repeated over and over again. A passionate vocation for happiness, always betrayed and misdirected, ends in a need for total defeat; it is completely foreign to what, in my heart of hearts, I've always known could be mine if it weren't for this constant desire to fail.

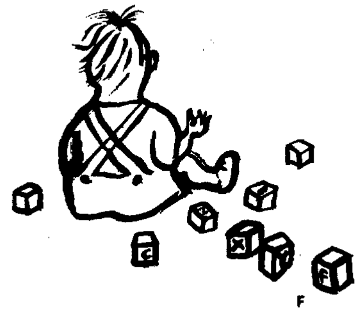
A family of four naked Indians comes aboard; he copulates with the woman, though she has "a rank smell of decomposing mud and rutting snake," and contracts, it turns out, a nearly fatal fever, of which he is cured by the commander of a frontier military outpost. The sawmills turn out to be real, even majestic, but inoperative because of a government plot against their Finnish makers. Maqroll, narrowly rescued from this cul-de-sac, discovers in the uplands that an establishment called the Snow of the Admiral, where he had hoped to find a former, much cherished mistress, Flor Estévez, is in ruins.

Yet the particulars of this useless voyage—the river currents, the encircling jungle, the stultifying heat, the grimy details of the barge's operation, the repulsive personality tics of those aboard—are rendered so vividly as to furnish a metaphor for life, as a colorful voyage to nowhere. Maqroll is in midlife; his consciousness is a web of past adventures, of old loves and tortuously failed enterprises, and his dreams figure as importantly as his present perils. His next adventure, "Ilona Comes with the Rain" (a less melodious equivalent of "Ilona Llega con la Lluvia"), has a heroine, and the muddy Xurandó is replaced by the torpid urban landscape of Panama City, where Maqroll is deposited by the suicide of the captain of the bankrupt tramp steamer on which he has been serving. He is sinking into squalor and petty crime in Panama's constant downpours:

> A curtain of rain fell into the filthy waters of the Pacific, and from my window the city seemed to dissolve, before my indifferent eyes, into fierce whirlpools of mud, garbage, and dead leaves spinning around the sewer openings.

At this low point, good fortune strikes, as is its habit with Maqroll:

> A ritual was being enacted, one that occurs with such punctual fidelity in my life that I can attribute it only to the impenetrable will of those tutelary gods who lead me through the obscurity of their designs by invisible but obvious strings.



He meets up with Ilona Grabowska Rubenstein, a dynamic, leggy international con artist who in the past has shared her favors and her illegal schemes with Maqroll and his Lebanese soul mate and sometime partner Abdul Bashur. Swiftly she takes Maqroll to bed, spruces him up, and appoints him her partner in an inspired venture, a whorehouse staffed with women dressed in the uniforms of airline stewardesses, thus catering to the fantasies of international travellers. The idea makes a fortune, but success bores both partners, and one of their *filles de joie*, who lives in a wrecked boat on the beach and imagines she has uniformed lovers from the time of Napoleon, fascinates Ilona fatally. This episode is less of a poem than the first, and more of a story, with the storyteller's vice of sentiment; the conclusion invites a donation of tears, of sympathetic sorrow.

"Un Bel Morir" appears to kill off Maqroll, after enlisting him, while he moldered in the seedy river town of La Plata (not the Argentine city), to run guns and explosives to rebels up in the cordillera. Both rebels and government eventually want to kill him, but he makes a getaway, albeit into the river's swampy estuary with a failing engine. Things look grim, yet we suspect that Maqroll, like the hero of a comic strip, leads a charmed life, with as many panels to come as his creator wishes to produce. Women—of whom a select few "filled his days with meaning and exorcised the demons of tedium and defeat whose attacks he feared as he feared death"—keep bestowing their magic potion. When Amparo María, a peasant girl, sleeps with him, we are told:

> The girl's feigned ecstasy became real, the result of her grateful admiration for the stranger who carried the burden of his years and the desolate, consuming experience of unknown lands and their intoxicating dangers and delights.

Possibly alert to the dangers of doting on his hero, Mutis next provides a tale in which Maqroll hardly appears, except as a cherished acquaintance of the principals. In "The Tramp Steamer's Last Port of Call," the shortest of the lot and one of the best, the narrator re-

GO CLOSE

Slip into the fighting.
Into a low-sky site crammed with huge men,
Attractive men, brave, loyal, fit, slab-sided men,
Men who came face to face with gods, who spoke with gods,
Leaping onto each other like wolves,
Screaming, kicking, slicing, hacking, ripping,
Thumping their chests:
"I am full of the god!"
Blubbering with terror as they beg for their lives:
"Laid his trunk open from shoulder to hip—
Like a beauty queen's sash."
Falling, falling.
Top-slung steel chain gates slumped onto concrete,
Pipko, Bluefisher, Chuckerbutty, Lox:
"Left all he had to follow Greece."
"Left all he had to follow Troy."
Clawing the ground, calling out for their sons, for revenge.

Sparks from the bronze, lit splinters from the poles:
"I am hit."
"Take my arm."
"I am dying."
"Shake my hand."
"Don't leave me. Don't let me go."
"Goodbye little fellow with the gloomy face."
As Greece, as Troy, fought on and on.
Or are they only asleep?
They are too tired to sleep.
The tears are falling from their eyes.
The noise they make while fighting is so loud
That what you see is like a silent film.
And as the dust converges over them
The ridge is as it is when darkness falls.

Silence and light.

—*Christopher Logue*

lates an experience he himself has had, in a voice close to what we know of Mutis's own life: "I had to go to Helsinki to attend a meeting of directors of internal publications for various oil companies." In Helsinki, he asks to be driven to the point from which he can see across the Gulf of Finland to St. Petersburg, a shimmering sight passingly eclipsed by the transit of a decrepit tramp steamer:

> The captain's bridge, and the row of cabins on the deck for crew members and occasional passengers, had been painted white a long time before. Now a coat of grime, oil, and urine gave them an indefinite color, the color of misery, of irreparable decadence, of desperate, incessant use. The chimerical freighter slipped through the water to the agonized gasp of its machinery and the irregular rhythm of driving rods that threatened at any moment to fall silent forever.

He sees the wretched, plucky ship, which fragmentary letters on its bow identify as the Halcyon, three more times—in Costa Rica, in Jamaica, and in the delta of the Orinoco River. Its apparition invades his dreams. While on another errand for the oil company, travelling downriver to a strike-threatened seaport refinery, he occupies one of the two cabins in a small tugboat; the other is occupied by a Basque sea captain called Jon Iturri, who, it turns out, was the captain of the ghostly tramp steamer, which broke up and sank in the Orinoco. Its owner, Iturri relates, was a Lebanese woman, a younger sister of Abdul Bashur, named Warda. At their first meeting, he says, he was stunned by her "almost Hellenic" beauty:

> "Her blue-black hair was as dense as honey and fell to shoulders as straight as those of the kouros in the Athens Museum. Her narrow hips, curving gently into long, somewhat full legs, recalled statues of Venus in the Vatican Museum and gave her erect body a definitive femininity that immediately dispelled a certain boyish air. Large, firm breasts completed the effect of her hips."

As he got to know her better, his admiration intensified: "Warda, when she was naked, acquired a kind of aura that emanated from the perfection of her body, the texture of her moist, elastic skin, and that face: seen from above, when we were in bed, it took on even more of the qualities of a Delphic vision." But the lovestruck captain was fifty, and a non-Muslim, and Warda was twenty-four and, the longer she lived in Europe, ever more approving of the conservative ways of her native Lebanon. The tramp steamer, which she inherited from an uncle, was financing her European sojourn with its hard-won profits; she flew to Iturri's ports of call and spent rapturous days in hotels with him, but their romance could last only as long as the fragile tramp steamer did. Warda's perfect, elastic, symmetrical beauty was one with the listing, disintegrating body of the ship as it conveyed her aging lover from port to port. The story, Mutis tells us at the outset, "has something of the eternal legends that have bewitched us over the centuries"; he ends by assuring us that "there has been only one love story since the beginning of time." Not a happy one.

The remaining three novellas—"Amirbar," in which Maqroll mines gold and performs buggery on his slavish, infatuated digging partner, Antonia; "Abdul Bashur, Dreamer of Ships," in which Maqroll's oft-mentioned partner in skulduggery searches the world for a perfect steamer; and "Triptych on Sea and Land," in which Maqroll's friendships with the fisherman Sverre Jensen, the painter Alejandro Obregón, and the child Jamil Vicente are described—all have their charms and excitements, and sustain the rueful mood, but we sense the author challenging his own ingenuity as he weaves cross-references and knits in dangling ends and patches some of the holes in the dreamily loose fabric of Maqroll's adventures. A kind of stiffening didactic brocade accumulates. These later tales expand the rolls of his acquaintanceship into, if not quite an Arthurian Round Table, a gallant brotherhood, "a small band . . . who have lived their lives under the sign of chance and adventure, and at the periphery of laws and codes created by men who, like Tartuffe, wish to justify their own paltry destinies." The brothers enjoy boozy reminiscences, hairbreadth escapes, and an amount of casual wenching that ill prepares us for the revelation that some of them, like Obregón and the narrator, are married. An elegant international machismo offers itself as a palliative for life's existential agony. Men with the right stuff can be recognized by their "inbred decency and . . . inflexible desire to respect the privacy of others," a "*gentilesse de coeur*" built on a rich past: of a one-legged German sea captain it is said, "His hard-won astuteness was concentrated in his eyes, where innumerable experiences, transgressions, compromises, things forgotten, and things remembered were carefully stored." The brotherhood includes not just Maqroll, Obregón, Abdul Bashur, and the narrator but the masculine-minded girl gangster Ilona, a lean tall waitress Maqroll calls the Governor, and a few actual persons, of whom Gabriel García Márquez appears at some length and Alastair Reid, the admirable Scots poet and translator from the Spanish, is mentioned once; a list of key nautical data includes "the speed at which you maintain the engines in order to enter the bay of Wigtown and anchor across from Withorn when you visit Alastair Reid." No doubt other real names and personal allusions are secreted in this increasingly chummy text.

Widening the circle has the final effect of narrowing it, of diluting the value of Maqroll the Gaviero as an isolated image of quintessential male experience. For what are these adventures and misadventures—gold strikes whose profits are squandered, voyages toward mirages, erotic conquests whose fruit is painful loss—but symbols of the chronic ventures and defeats of the restless, death-plagued male mind? Mutis's fiction, like Hemingway's, advertises a life style, a prescription for living. Part of the secret is travelling light; Maqroll has the "air of a sailor who's been thrown off his ship" and carries no more than his clothes and a few archly recondite books. What is it, in his minimal baggage, that keeps Maqroll rolling through the "network of itineraries," "the dark human labyrinth that leads to a small heap of gray ashes"? He and his creator worry alike at the problem "Why live?" Maqroll explains that gold mines "interested me as a way to explore a world I did not know, the sort of challenge that allows me to go on living and not look for false escapes." A false escape, we gather, is one that spurns "the empty illusions of ambition and desire" and embraces "a destiny chosen and drained to the last drop of misfortune."

Misfortune is rarely so complete, however, as to lack the price of a good restaurant meal or a night with a splendid woman: "I embraced the Governor's firm body with the joyful despair of the vanquished who know that our only victory is the triumph of the senses on the ephemeral but true field of pleasure." The metaphysical joys of intercourse take the prose to pompous heights; we read that the Governor's legs "encircled my body with movements adapted to the rhythm of a pleasure that was postponed with Alexandrine wisdom," and a Canadian Indian lass "conscientiously controlled her sensuality, and this had the charm of an artful eroticism that concealed its simulations behind an exceptional aesthetic sense." But nothing distinguishes Maqroll's women so much as their willingness to knock themselves out for him, reaping misfortune and abandonment for their pains. His deepest relation is with his destiny, an obscure entity having less to do with God than with the gods, "the powers that move the strings." On the final page, Maqroll decrees, "If it exists at all, the pity of the gods is indecipherable or comes to us when we breathe our last." This could be lines from a poem by Borges; it is curious that poets on the most Catholic of continents are drawn to the gloomy polytheism of pre-Christian paganism.

In the meantime, besides the consolations of sex and French books ("Mémoires du Cardinal de Retz," Chateaubriand's "Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe," Émile Gabory's study of the wars of the Vendée, the letters and memoirs of the Belgian Prince of Ligne, all listed in an appendix, "The Gaviero's Reading"), Maqroll experiences "confounding moments of incomprehensible joy." We don't hear much about them, moments like those which led C. S. Lewis, for example, to Christian faith, though a poem by Mutis, "A Street in Córdoba," describes (in Reid's translation) a "certainty that now sweeps over me like a sudden high temperature . . . the certainty that in this street, in this city . . . was the single, irreplaceable place where everything would come together for me / in this fullness that overcomes death and its devices." Maqroll usually distrusts happiness: "So many moments of irritating, wearisome disgust are returned to us years later by memory as splendidly happy episodes. Nostalgia is the lie that speeds our approach to death." The question "Why live?" is answered, if at all, by an implied harmony between the "sordid disasters" of the lived life and the abysmal negativity at the heart of the universe. Lone rangers, from Don Quixote to Sam Spade and James Bond, are customarily engaged in combat against bad guys; they afford themselves the escapism of a virtuous quest, a perpetual cleanup. Maqroll instead presents himself as one of the bad guys, "on the periphery of laws and codes," and proposes that bad guys aren't so bad, as they smuggle and pimp and deal their way through the world. They are good guys. Maybe so, but it leaves the reader with no one much to cheer for, in adventures that aspire to the epic. ♦

DEPARTMENT OF HOSTILITY

Just as the guests sat down to dinner Mr. Mesnier began pitting them with his homemade cherry pitter made of cork and a coat hanger.

From the Times.

BOOKS

HARMONIC CONVERGENCE

Richard Powers sings the body eclectic.

BY SVEN BIRKERTS

In some artists—James Merrill and Milan Kundera, for instance—the inborn human structure-making impulse heats to fever, yielding works that reflect intense private struggles for equilibrium. Among our younger novelists, no one better exemplifies this than Richard Powers. Powers, at forty-five, is the author of eight novels, each as different as can be from its successor but driven by a similar patterning urge: the plot complications generate systems of theme and variation—not as playful as Kundera's, but no less ingenious.

Powers's formalism is most obvious in "The Gold Bug Variations" (1991), his third novel, which took pattern-making itself as its subject, using the obsessions of its central characters to play the intricacies of molecular biology against the architectonics of Baroque music. If somewhat emotionally arid, the novel was brawny with ambition, auguring more honors and prizes for Powers, already a MacArthur Fellow.

Subsequent novels have taken up anomalies of illness and storytelling ("Operation Wandering Soul"), artificial intelligence ("Galatea 2.2"), corporate accountability ("Gain"), and, in "Plowing the Dark," the premises of virtuality. Now, in "The Time of Our Singing" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $27), Powers continues his inventory of the salient themes of late-modern life, addressing a topic that has so far resisted most contemporary novelists, and certainly most contemporary white novelists: race.

Working in his preferred contrapuntal mode—shifting between characters and time periods as well as themes—Powers unfolds the saga of two generations of the musical, intellectual, mixed-race Strom family. The father, David, a European-born Jew who has lost his entire family to the Holocaust, is a theoretical physicist working on problems of time. The mother, Delia, is black, the daughter of a proud and gruffly outspoken Philadelphia physician, who early casts a skeptical eye on her aspirations to become the next Marian Anderson. Alas, she never does. On Easter Sunday of 1939, she meets David on the Mall in Washington (she has gone to hear her idol sing) and, against her own better judgment, falls in love. As they marry and start a family, Delia's musical strivings are taken up by her sons, Jonah, who is blessed with a perfect voice, and Joseph, a more than capable pianist. Their younger sister, Ruth, resists the call of her own talent. The Stroms, devoting themselves to the gifts of their children, dream of rearing them free of the scourges of race. For David, caught in the toils of the theoretical, "race is only real if you freeze time. . . . We all move along a curve that will break down and rebuild us all." The family lives toward a future that has left the issue of race behind; it tries to live *as if.* But though the world of classical music, like that of science, is relatively color-blind, it is not the world.

Richard Powers

"The Time of Our Singing" is a heady, panoramic novel, scored, like so much of Powers's work, for full orchestra. The central story, narrated by Joseph, maps the career of his prodigy brother, recounting Jonah's artistic progress from the time of his stunning début, in 1961, at a national competition in North Carolina—he is twenty—through various performing and recording triumphs (with Joseph for many years his accompanist). It concludes with his death from an injury received in the post-Rodney King verdict rioting in Oakland, a bitter but possibly fitting irony, as most of Jonah's life was lived at the purest "artistic" remove from the catastrophes of race. Powers offers us scenes and bulletins of the civil-rights struggle, from the murder of Emmett Till to the Watts riots, creating a growing sense of the division between artistic purity and life on the streets. This is the core tension of a mainly episodic work. If there is a bridge, a spanning element, it is Ruth. Never able to abide the family's ethos of music as a world apart, and later traumatized by Delia's death in a suspicious house fire, she takes up with a black-militant activist, and goes underground to work with the Black Panthers. She is the one who will break the family's art-versus-life standoff. "The Time of Our Singing" is premised on a kind of Devil's bargain. "Doctor Faustus," Thomas Mann's great parable of music and evil, plays as a ghostly thematic backdrop. The worse things get out in the rough real world, the more beautifully Jonah sings. Or is it the other way around? At one point—it is the late sixties, the time of urban rioting—the brothers leave a recording session in New York and hear a siren in the street. Joseph catches hold of Jonah in a panic: "I was waiting for the return loop, for some part of the city to ignite. I knew what happened whenever we laid down his voice into permanence." The strange dynamic holds until Jonah is at last pulled to earth and the dream of musical perfection shatters.

Powers is at his best when he writes about this dream, about the modes, the melodies, the sheer bravura of making song: "We gave them Dallapiccola," Joseph recalls of one competition performance, "which impressed but did not delight. Then one of the judges asked for a verse of the Dowland, to clear the palette before they dismissed us. We discharged the first verse, but when we reached the double bar, Jonah, shooting me a larcenous glance, pressed on through the end of the song. That tune's second verse scans like a battered reverse translation, impossible to phrase inside the melody that works so brilliantly with the first stanza." Passage after passage carries us to what feels like the innermost sanctum of the singer's art.

But Powers also wants to fathom the root brutalities of race, and at this he is less successful. If he has always fallen short in the presentation of viscerally compelling characters (his are too often fleshed-out tendencies, personalities conveniently narrowed around their obsessions), he has generally compensated with the intricacy of his designs and with sentences rich in ideas. But his previous subjects—virtual reality, the impacts of industry—lent themselves more readily to his formalism. Race, which is to say racism, in American life cannot be dramatized without the jagged extrusions of rage and hopeless sorrow. And these primary emotions require fully felt characters before they can live on the page. None of the major characters in this novel quite earn the histories ascribed to them. They are interesting, they carry the complex freight of their reflections, they raise from all different angles the issues of mixed identity, but if you cut them they do not bleed. Not enough, anyway.

This is a shame, for Powers is one of our most lavishly gifted writers. The arc of his career is rising steadily and honestly, and his intelligence is humane and nourishing. But while "The Time of Our Singing" rewards on many levels—musical, structural, intellectual—the characters cannot heft the ancient burden of their theme. Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, though much blunter as a character, managed to leave the print of his pain, the pounding echo of his blues. Powers achieves a subtler music, but, for all its fascination, it tends to fade as the pages are turned. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Slynx, *by Tatyana Tolstaya, translated from the Russian by Jamey Gambrell (Houghton Mifflin; $24).* The hero of this spellbinding futuristic novel, a government scribe named Benedikt, lives in a primitive settlement on the site of Moscow, two hundred years after "the Blast." No one knows quite how the old world was destroyed; as Benedikt puts it, "People were playing around and played too hard with someone's *arms.*" Citizens born after the Blast exist on a diet of mice and "worrums" and bear frightening mutations, or "Consequences"—a tail, a single eye, a head covered with fringed red coxcombs. Other inhabitants, called Oldeners, haven't aged at all since the Blast, and harbor memories of a lost culture that go unheeded by their descendants. Tolstaya's radioactive world is a cunning blend of Russia's feudal and Soviet eras, with abuse of serfs, mandatory government service, and regulation of literature. The dangers that threaten, however, feel more contemporary: to the south, Chechens; and to the west a civilization that might hold some promise, except that its members "don't know anything about us."

Kafka Goes to the Movies, *by Hanns Zischler, translated from the German by Susan H. Gillespie (Chicago; $30).* The premise is beguiling: if you know Kafka's taste in movies, you might just know the man. Zischler, a film actor and writer, spent years researching the films Kafka watched after Prague got its first cinema, in 1907. It was an era when silents like "The White Slave Girl" were creating a sensation in the local papers. Zischler's detective work is impressive, bringing to light a wealth of movie posters, reviews, and stills, which he juxtaposes with Kafka's journals and letters. Unfortunately, Kafka remains a cipher, and Zischler has to compensate with lit-crit flights of fancy, complete with paren(theses). Still, his notion that movies were a place where Kafka could indulge his "wish for unselfconscious loneliness" is appealing, as is the thought of the writer taking a well-earned break from his nightmare imaginings. "This evening tore myself away from writing," Kafka wrote in his diary. "Cinematograph at the Landestheater."

Captives, *by Linda Colley (Pantheon; $27.50).* The story of the British Empire has often been told as a steady, irresistible rise. Colley, however, shows how complex and uncertain that rise really was by examining the lives of the hundreds of thousands of Britons taken captive in America, North Africa, and India between 1600 and 1850. Captives embodied the costs of empire and the possibility of failure. Many of them came from the lower classes—a reminder of the fact that those who built the imperial edifice were usually not its prime beneficiaries. Often, they spent years living in—and even accommodating themselves to—foreign cultures, underscoring the fact that the Empire always depended as much upon negotiation and collaboration with local peoples as upon sheer force. Colley's final, provocative suggestion is that it wasn't just the actual hostages who were held captive but, rather, all Britons who found themselves in empire's thrall.

The Joy of Sex, *by Alex Comfort (Crown; $29.95).* When Comfort's epochal manual was published, thirty years ago, it made its author, who died in 2000, famous as a kind of Dr. Spock for grown-ups, an avatar of the new dawn of sexual liberation. Now that dawn looks like a brief historical window between the pill and AIDS, and this updated version of Comfort's text is a curious hybrid, in which rapturous descriptions of "Foursomes and Moresomes" sit uncomfortably beside instructions about blood tests, dental dams, and other necessary precautions. Though the cookbook-style chapter headings held over from the original—"Appetizers," "Main Courses," and so on—continue to proclaim the pleasures of the feast, the book is starting to read like a HACCP Food Safety guide.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

ART HOUSES

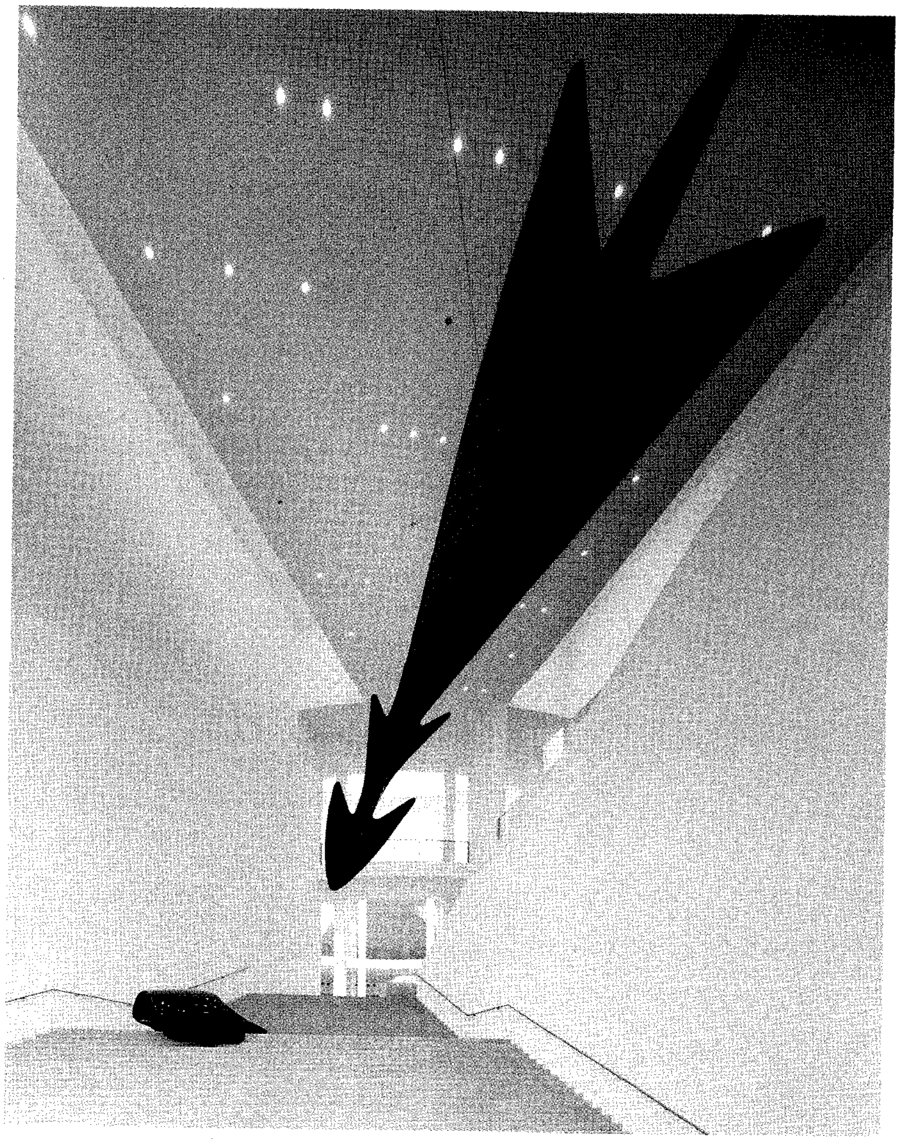
Why a white shoebox in Munich succeeds as a museum.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The new Pinakothek der Moderne, in Munich, is a museum that has been strenuously designed for looking at art. This makes it unusual among recently built museums, where what is on display often feels incidental to symbolic functions of the sort that churches and government buildings once fulfilled. Munich's new showcase for modern art, which opened in September, next door to the Alte and Neue Pinakotheks of Old Master and nineteenth-century works, completes one of the world's most remarkable museum complexes. It houses a pretty good painting collection, which is strongest in German Expressionists and Max Beckmann, and has superb holdings in drawing, design, and architectural models. Designed by Stephan Braunfels, it is a big but self-effacing, "invisible" building: on the outside, a bland concrete-steel-and-glass shoebox; on the inside, a dream of subtly proportioned, shadowless, sugar-white galleries that branch off from an airy, three-story rotunda. In the effulgent atmosphere, you may know where the walls are only by where the pictures hang. I gratefully watched colors combust in Kirchners and Noldes under translucent, all-skylight ceilings. (I'll never again think of Expressionist color as generally sour and arbitrary.) On an ordinary rainy Tuesday in November, the place was thronged with people in festive spirits. The Moderne is a great success.

But then many new museums win praise without demonstrating comparable solicitude for their contents. Museums have become hot spots, invested with cultural and civic passions that pay off in popularity. I don't know why this has happened, and I'm not well placed to speculate about it. I'm an art lover. As a class, art lovers don't care all that much about museums. We go to them for the same reason that Willie Sutton robbed banks: they have what we want. We appreciate decent light in tranquil rooms, but we will do without that if the art is worthwhile. To ignore the distractions of a bad building or, for that matter, a good one—and I can see how the Moderne's luminous intensity, which casts every art work as an icon, might get on a person's nerves after a while—isn't all that difficult. Art lovers have come to accept overdesigned spaces, jangling gift shops, rambunctious tour groups, patronizing curatorial wall texts, the babble of Acoustiguides, and other evidence of marketing and educational policies whose target audience is not us. We have made ourselves comfortable in lots of different kinds of museums, each a variation on a general type.

The Moderne's excellence is all the more impressive in view of the kind of museum it is. "The civic," I call it. The civic museum represents not only a city's treasures but its prestige and its self-image. The defining ritual of the civic museum is the opening reception, at which members of the local élite pride themselves on being up to date. The Moderne tells a story of modernity from a Munich perspective: reverential about the past, bold as it approaches the present. When I was there, a vast Andy Warhol "piss painting"—green stains of urine on copper emulsion—presided over the rotunda's grand staircase, proclaiming unflappable cosmopolitanism. (As a bonus, the work is beauti-



"Form Study for a Winged Solar Mobile," by Luigi Colani, in the Pinakothek der Moderne, a new museum designed by Stephan Braunfels. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

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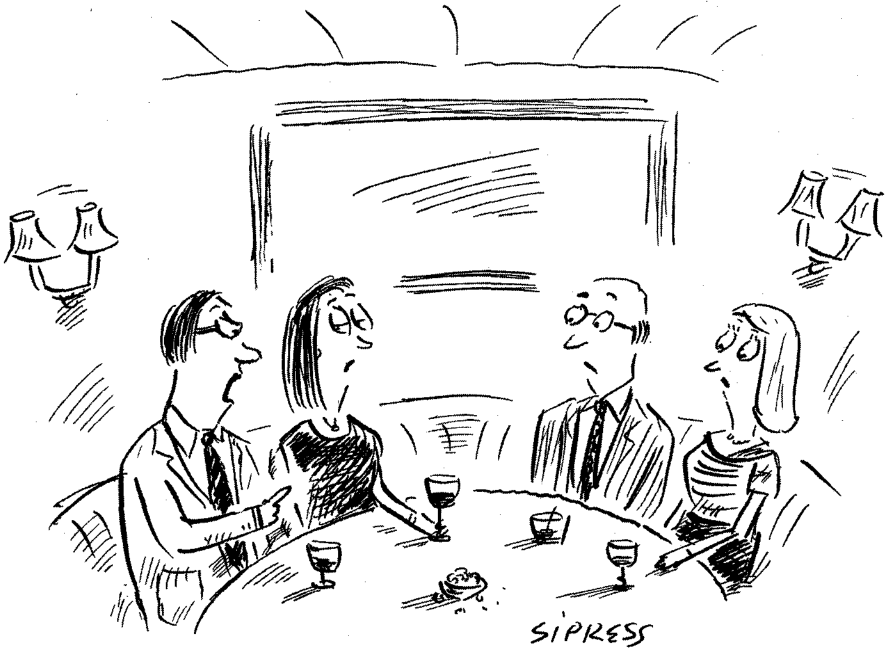


"By the way, that's not just my *opinion. It also happens to be the opinion of some guy on NPR."*

• •

ful.) The sassy choice has special éclat in a city that is burdened, like no other, with monuments of Nazism and a reputation for cultural conservatism. The directors of civic museums understand that their decisions are fundamentally political. As a consequence, they are apt to overdo pedagogy and social righteousness. (Think of the Whitney and the New Museum, in New York, which do good more often than well.) The Moderne, with exacting connoisseurship and minimal explanatory material, bravely bets that people, at least the people of Munich, attend museums for a treat rather than a treatment.

Other categories in my museum taxonomy are "the encyclopedia," "the house," "the boutique," "the pavilion," "the laboratory," and—of late the most controversial—"the destination," of which the archetype is Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim, in New York, and the apotheosis is Frank Gehry's Guggenheim, in Bilbao. Like many art lovers, I really cherish only the encyclopedia (the Met, the Louvre) and the house (the Frick Collection, Frida Kahlo's home in Mexico City). The encyclopedia is the Home Depot of the soul, with something to requite every mood. Its rewards are inexhaustible. The house museum personalizes art love. It solves a chronic problem of museums: the Pantheon effect. The presence of a painting or sculpture in, say, the Met bespeaks cold, officious esteem. It can be intimidating. To forge a warm bond with a work of art in such a setting takes forceful concentration. In a house museum, affection rules. The art glows with what William Blake called "the lineaments of gratified desire." It is there only because someone in particular particularly liked it.

The boutique museum, by contrast, restricts itself to some sharply defined field, idea, or taste. It needn't be small. The Museum of Modern Art is a kind of mega-boutique, where one can view the creative wares of the twentieth century as aspects of an epic narrative, amid a lively debate over the nature of modernity. (MOMA's temporary plant in Queens is something else: a pocket destination dominated by a fun-filled lobby. The shorthand name MOMA QNS—"momakins"—befits it, as a hang-out for cool rich kids. This makes sense. Such kids may grow up to be board members one day.) But MOMA is sui generis, unmatched by any other museum. Its would-be rival in London, the Tate Modern (which features the worst lighting and the most obtrusive curating of any museum I know), and the Centre Pompidou, in Paris (which, despite recent improvements, still feels like a convention center on the verge of a nervous breakdown), are overwhelmingly civic in character. And they are great public successes, too.

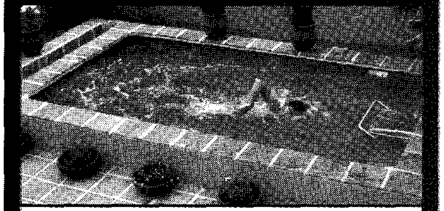
A museum's true identity resides not in where it is lodged or how it is run but in its collection. The most common fault of museums—and this is true not only of new ones—is a self-important design that belies middling contents: dazzling package, few cookies. Examples abound. One is the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, where a pleasant but undistinguished collection comes as a severe anticlimax to a grandiose, destination-type, infernally noisy lobby. Museum boards may find it unbearable to address the weaknesses of their inventory when conceiving of a home for it. They pay for their momentary comfort with lasting embarrassment.

The quality of the boutique museum depends on an exact or understated match between what the building looks like and what it shows. America boasts some brilliant examples. Louis Kahn's Kimbell Museum, in Fort Worth, and Renzo Piano's Menil Collection, in Houston, are close to perfect, and the Norton Simon Museum, in Pasadena, affords us the happy surprise of encountering great art in an oddball building. Two recently completed small boutiques in New York are also triumphs: the American Folk Art Museum, an astute jewel box, and the Neue Galerie, a scholarly salon with the charm of a house museum. It can be done.

The pavilion museum and the laboratory are variants of the boutique. The former is often set in a park, rhyming art and nature. I think of the rambling Louisiana Museum, outside Copenhagen, on a grassy cliff with a view of Sweden, across the sea, and also of the elegant Galerie Beyeler, in Basel, where I recently saw a Monet show that is still confused in my memory with the surrounding gardens, water, and breezes. The laboratory museum is often attached to a university. The Fogg, at Harvard, owns some great paintings, but it's tough for visitors, in the tweedy ambience, to shake a sense that they are looking at gym equipment for pumping up art historians. The Wexner Center for the Arts, in Columbus, Ohio, by the cerebral Peter Eisenman, is a laboratory as destination: a deconstructivist folly with uniformly weird, essentially art-proof spaces. One must see it to believe it. Collections of contemporary art are, by definition, provisional, and they often advertise the fact by occupying abandoned industrial structures. The model is Gehry's masterly 1983 renovation of a warehouse and garage in Los Angeles. Dubbed the Temporary Contemporary (it is now, officially, the Geffen Contemporary Museum), it has become a permanent annex of the inveterately civic Museum of Contemporary Art.

The destination museum—part cathedral, part tourist trap, and altogether an art work in itself—has become the crowning emblem of our globalist era of competing polities and economies. It can be a fine thing, especially if it is done by Gehry. When it comes to ideas, architecture generally lags a generation behind art. ("Art is fast and cheap; architecture is slow and expensive," a friend of mine likes to point out.) The revolutionary Bilbao Guggenheim leaps ahead, making even a first-rate, colossal sculpture by Richard Serra seem rather old hat. Contrary to some observers, I feel that the building serves traditional art quite well. But that is scarcely the point for an institution with a scrappy collection and the mission of putting a poky city on the map (which it has accomplished). The place is a joy. So is Wright's Guggenheim, whose interior may be more hostile to art than that of any other museum. But it makes no sense to begrudge such a marvel.

In a city like Munich, which is already a destination for art lovers, architectural adventures are unnecessary. The Pinakothek der Moderne shrewdly and sensitively accepts its role as one piece in an ensemble, limiting itself to showing modern art in a modern way. Its "white box" galleries conform to a convention that, for more than fifty years, has been the default mode of a civilization that lost a way of integrating art into the world architecturally, decoratively, or spiritually. No one, I think, is happy with this situation. Who wouldn't welcome a grand, potently symbolic reintegration—a new Baroque? Gehry's infectious originality is a step in that direction, as are some works by today's better installation artists. Meanwhile, we have in the Moderne the acme of the all-white museum, which exalts twentieth-century art's ambition to be both autonomous and transcendent. Artists of the current century can only dream of a museum that will one day ratify their ideals with such percipient flair. ♦



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THE CURRENT CINEMA

NOCTURNES

"The Pianist" and "25th Hour."

BY DAVID DENBY

Scenes from a recurring nightmare: families gathered in an enormous yard, ignorant of where they are going and fearing the worst; bewildered strangers at the edges of a crowd muttering to themselves; despairing attempts to save a treasured violin; and then a train whistle, a noise so unequivocal in its associations that it has assumed the portent of a symbol, the permanence of a scar. The deportations to the Nazi death camps have become the Jewish Passion play, an event whose meaning lies as much in endless representation and reiteration as in the feelings of rage and grief that it calls up. In the most recent version, Roman Polanski's "The Pianist," we are acquainted with the fate of an upper-bourgeois family in Warsaw from 1939 to 1945, and particularly with the story of the family's musical son, Wladyslaw (or Wladek) Szpilman, a real-life piano virtuoso and composer who regularly played Chopin on Polish radio. In 1942, when the Szpilman family is herded, along with thousands of others, into the cattle cars, one of the Jewish collaborators—a policeman working for the S.S.—pulls Szpilman out of the crowd, throws him to the ground where the Germans can't see him, and tells him to disappear. Szpilman just walks away, departing from the mouth of the cataract in a daze. Later, alone in an empty ghetto street, he weeps as he moves through the abandoned clothing, furniture, and family photographs strewn on the ground. He is not a fighter, not a hero, not a highly conscious man. He doesn't even choose life; it is given to him by a collaborator and then by a series of Resistance fighters, who spirit him from one hiding place to another. Out of a prewar population of three hundred and fifty thousand Warsaw Jews, he is one of the two hundred or so who survived until the Soviet liberation in 1945.

It should be said right away that "The Pianist," which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes last year, is not a work of great originality or imagination. Its protagonist lacks depth, and the theme of survival through hiding is, by its very nature, redundant. Nor is the movie as well acted or as complex as "Schindler's List," which examined evil as well as goodness and discovered an ambiguous intimacy between the two. Yet Polanski offers a superbly confident and poised depiction of the stages of destruction and the anomaly of escape—the increasing humiliations, the forming of the ghetto, the uprising, the daily anguish of seclusion. The movie's sense of detail and proportion is exact, the violence neither exaggerated nor minimized but presented always with clear-eyed accuracy. Polanski, the talented director of "Repulsion," "Chinatown," and "Macbeth," has often been a cruel joker, perverse, bloody, given to black humor and mordant ironies; now he returns to the physical and emotional wellsprings of his art (he escaped the Kraków ghetto wher he was seven), viewing his origins fror a perspective that can only be callec humanist. Polanski is not excited by cruelty anymore. At the age of sixty-nine he appears disgusted by it.

At the beginning of the movie, set i September, 1939, as artillery rounds hi Warsaw, we see Szpilman playing Chopin's Nocturne in C-Sharp Minor at th state radio station. He continues to pla until the exploding shells knock hir from his bench. A man in his late twenties, famous in Poland, Szpilman's a bi

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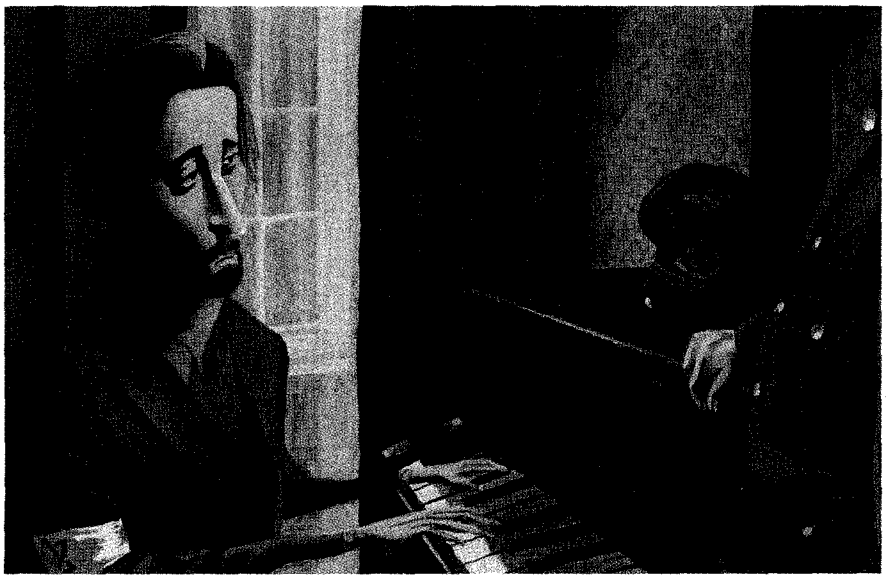
of a dandy, with a long face, a large, refined nose, and sleepy, melancholy eyes. Adrien Brody, the lean young American actor who has been on the verge of stardom for some years, and who looks in this movie like the svelte George Gershwin of the thirties, has a sweet, sweet smile. He gives Szpilman elements of vanity and weakness as well as a persevering obstinacy. At first, the pianist, a member of a loving, quarrelsome family, refuses to take the Occupation seriously—he shrugs it off as an irritation. Then he accommodates himself to the increasing restrictions imposed on the Jews as best he can. But the Nazis up the ante at every stage, killing Jews on the street whenever they feel like it. Szpilman's gaze remains mild, while his forehead contracts slightly in pain. Silently, he retreats into the shell of artist and performer. With a faint air of distaste, he plays café-style junk for the collaborators and appeasers in the ghetto who have the money to buy some leisure. The world blows up all around him.


Adrien Brody plays a musician in the Warsaw ghetto.

This is a big movie made utterly without strain, large-scaled when it needs to be, intimate when intimacy is called for. Much of it was shot in Warsaw, and, at every moment, from the demeanor of the passersby to the morale of a workforce marching in and out of the ghetto, the situation of the Jews, moving toward death and then toward resistance, is made absolutely clear to us. "The Pianist" is strictly chronological; Polanski avoids intercutting between locations, and any kind of suspense. No one is coming to save these people, and every consecutive second brings the end nearer. After Szpilman's family is deported, he gets work among the remaining members of the ghetto, but then, as the Jewish uprising of 1943 approaches, he runs away, landing in an apartment just over the ghetto wall. His fate is to watch—first the uprising and its suppression, and then, from another hiding place, the general Warsaw uprising of 1944, which comes closer and closer to Szpilman and finally, absurdly, bursts right into his apartment when a German tank fires at the building. Reduced to quivering terror, he hangs from the roof, like Harold Lloyd in one of his silent comedies, and German soldiers use him for target practice. Szpilman's survival is almost as arbitrary and gratuitous as the deaths of innocent millions.

Is he ashamed, guilty, defiant, disgusted? Grateful for his luck? We don't have a clue. Ronald Harwood, the playwright and screenwriter who adapted the 1946 book that Szpilman wrote about his experiences, gives him virtually nothing to say. Szpilman is a two-dimensional man, a poorly defined compound of talent and fear, an artist without anything on his mind but art, and, as he gets knocked from pillar to post, he interests us less and less. That he's a non-hero is fine. But an unconscious man cannot be a great movie character, and we begin to think of Szpilman as *merely* a piano player, a kind of trained monkey who is actually a smaller figure than the more impassioned men seen along the edges of the movie. At the end, after liberation, when he returns to the radio studio and plays the same Chopin nocturne that he played six years earlier, the effect is spooky, his smile a little unnerving. The movie is about preservation and restoration and the power of art. But with what gain in knowledge? It's as if Szpilman had no soul, and no will, apart from an endless desire to tickle the keys.

Spike Lee's profanely eloquent "25th Hour" comes to a climax of sorts when its hero, Monty Brogan (Edward Norton), a New York drug dealer who's about to enter the slammer, goes to the rest room in his father's bar and sees the words "Fuck you" written on the mirror. Using those words as a prologue to each section of his discourse, Monty proceeds to curse out, in explicit and insulting detail, just about every ethnic group in New York, including Muslims, Jews, Italians, the brothers in Harlem, and many other people, ending with himself. Long before we get to the conclusion of the scene, we realize that Monty's rant is a kind of perverse love letter, New York style, to the life he is about to leave. The movie, derived from David Benioff's novel (Benioff wrote the fantastically voluble screenplay, too), might be described as a turbulent elegy for the burned-out hopes of a generation. On his last day of freedom, Monty receives solace from his two oldest friends, a cynical Wall Street trader (Barry Pepper) and a schlubby private-school teacher (Philip Seymour Hoffman), both of whom, provoked by his departure, are forced to confront their own dissatisfactions. A large part of the movie consists of wrenching confrontations among these three, with occasional scenes between Monty and his sorrowful dad (Brian Cox) and loving girlfriend (Rosario Dawson). "25th Hour" is a crime-genre movie devoted to personal relations and New York atmosphere. It captures the city's bitter, wire-taut mood after September 11th, and I hope that Disney, despite its disastrous mistiming of the movie's release (putting it up against seasonal blockbusters), finds some way to bring this acrid and brilliant little picture to the large audience it deserves. ♦

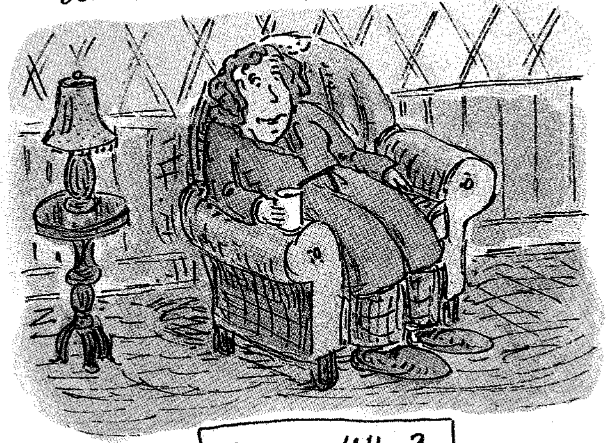
THE BACK PAGE BY ROZ CHAST

RECIPES FOR COMFORT DRINKS

Cozy

2 oz. hot cocoa
4 oz. vodka
3 marshmallows

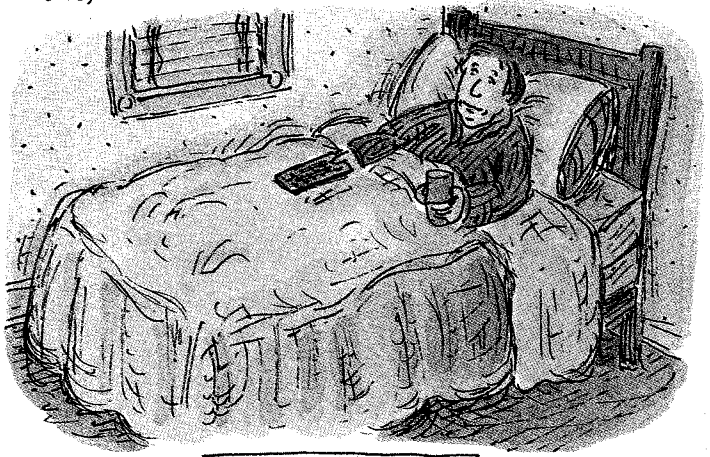
Combine cocoa and vodka. Garnish with marshmallows. Serves one nicely, but it's your call.



The Healing Begins

2 tbsp. hot milk
1 tbsp. honey
4 oz. rum

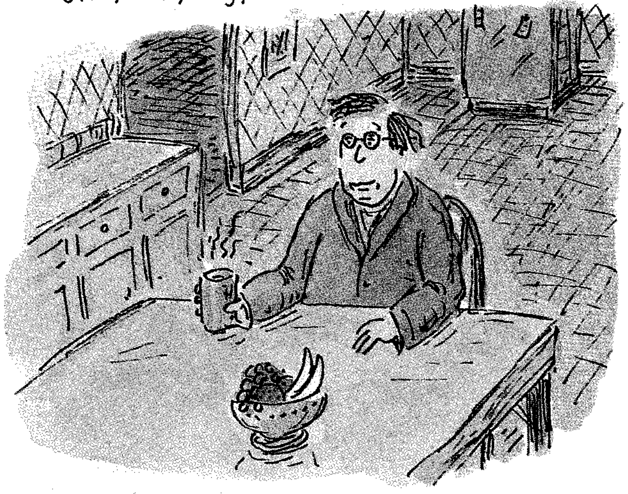
Stir everything together. Should be fine for one, but if a tad more is needed, that's O.K.



Osama Who?

1/2 c. camomile tea
2 tsp. sugar
4 oz. Scotch

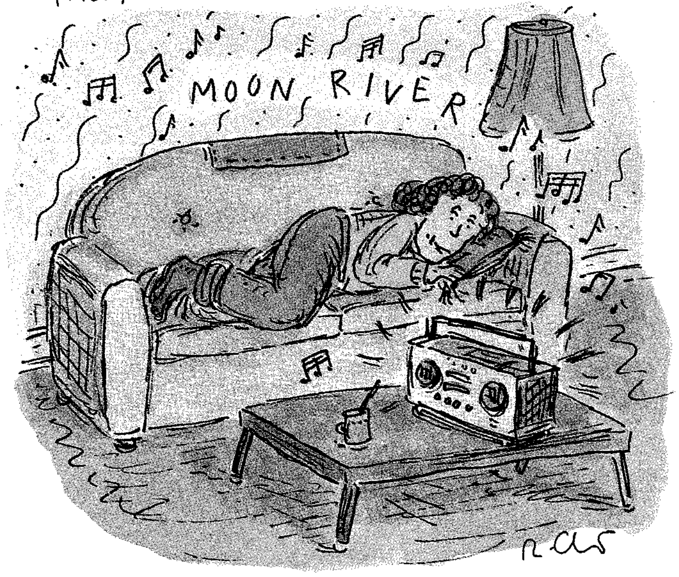
Mix tea, sugar, and Scotch. Makes one, but, hey, who are we to say?

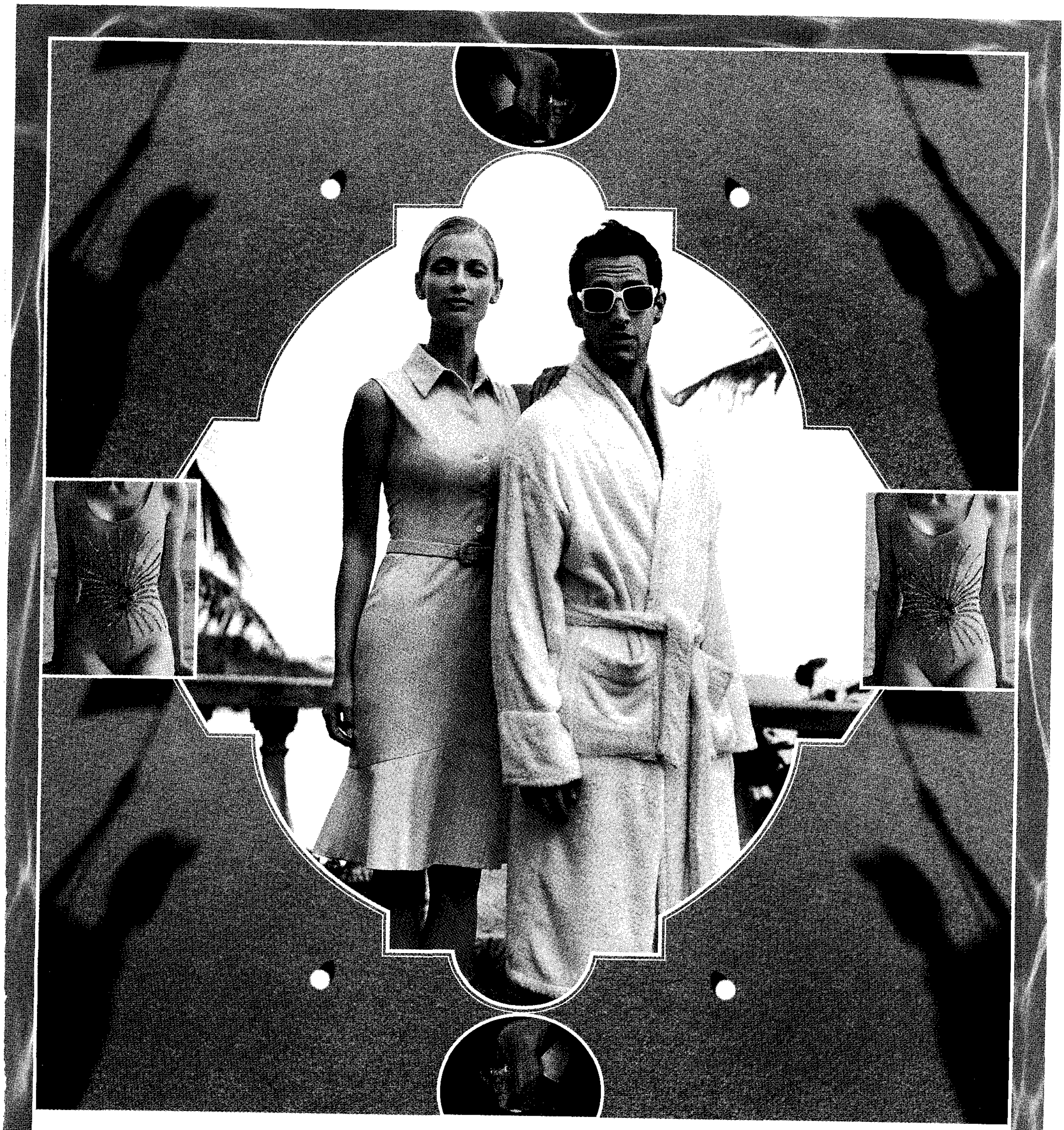


Home Security

1/2 c. vanilla pudding
4 oz. gin

Blend pudding and gin. One ought to do the trick, but these are difficult times.





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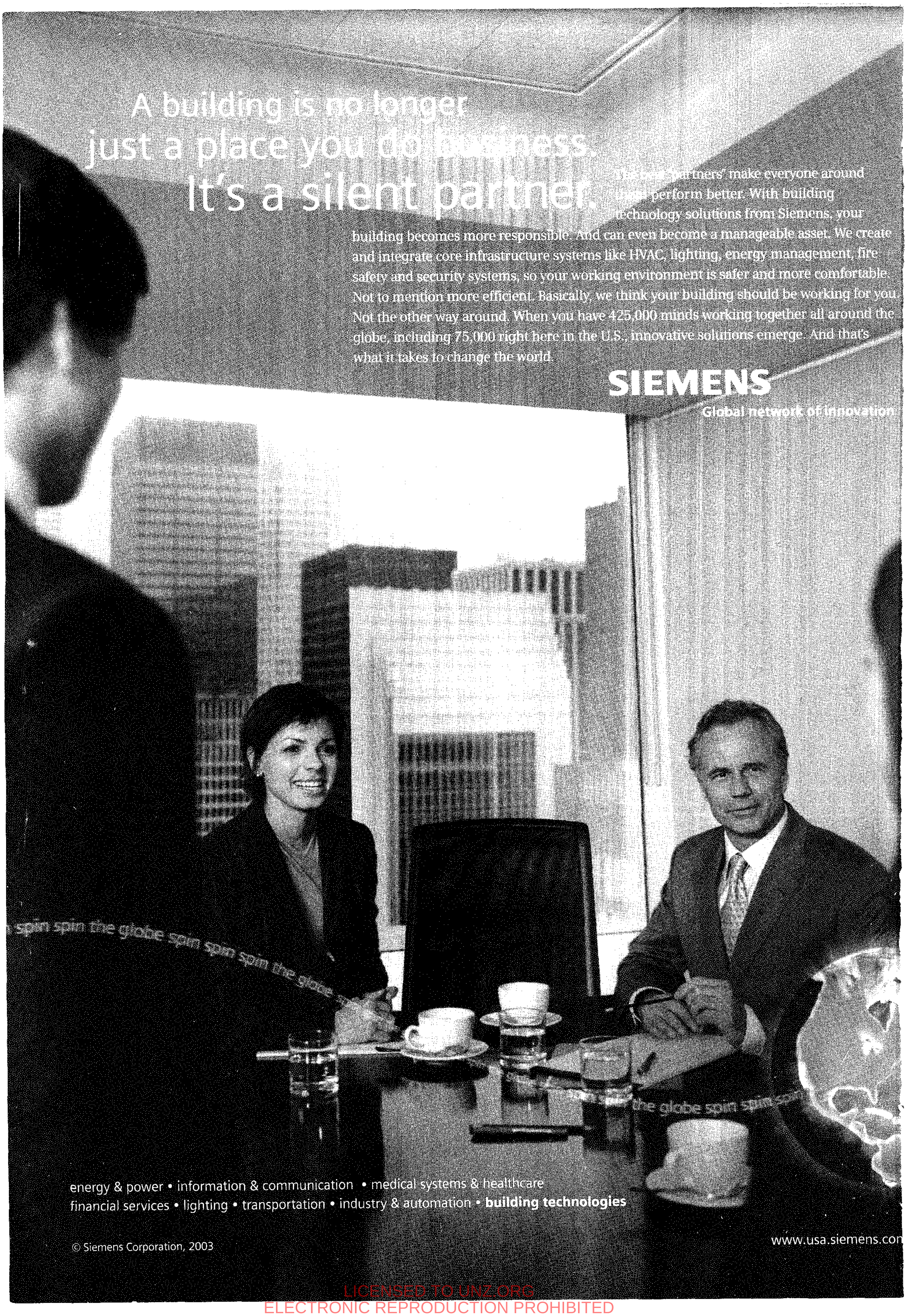
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